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A SPORTING EPISODE.

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THE MISHMEE HILLS

AN ACCOUNT OF A JOURNEY MADE IN AN ATTEMPT TO PENETRATE THIBET FROM ASSAM TO OPEN NEW ROUTES FOR COMMERCE

By T. T. COOPER, F.R.G.S.

Acting Political Agent at Bhamo

Author of 'Travels of a Pioneer of Commerce in Pig-tail and Petticoats' &c.

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1873

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LORD STANLEY OF ALDERLEY

AS A TOKEN OF ADMIRATION

FOR HIS ZEALOUS INTEREST IN ASIATIC PROGRESS

AND OF GRATITUDE FOR MUCH PERSONAL KINDNESS

This Book is Dedicated

BY HIS OBLIGED AND HUMBLE SERVANT

THE AUTHOR

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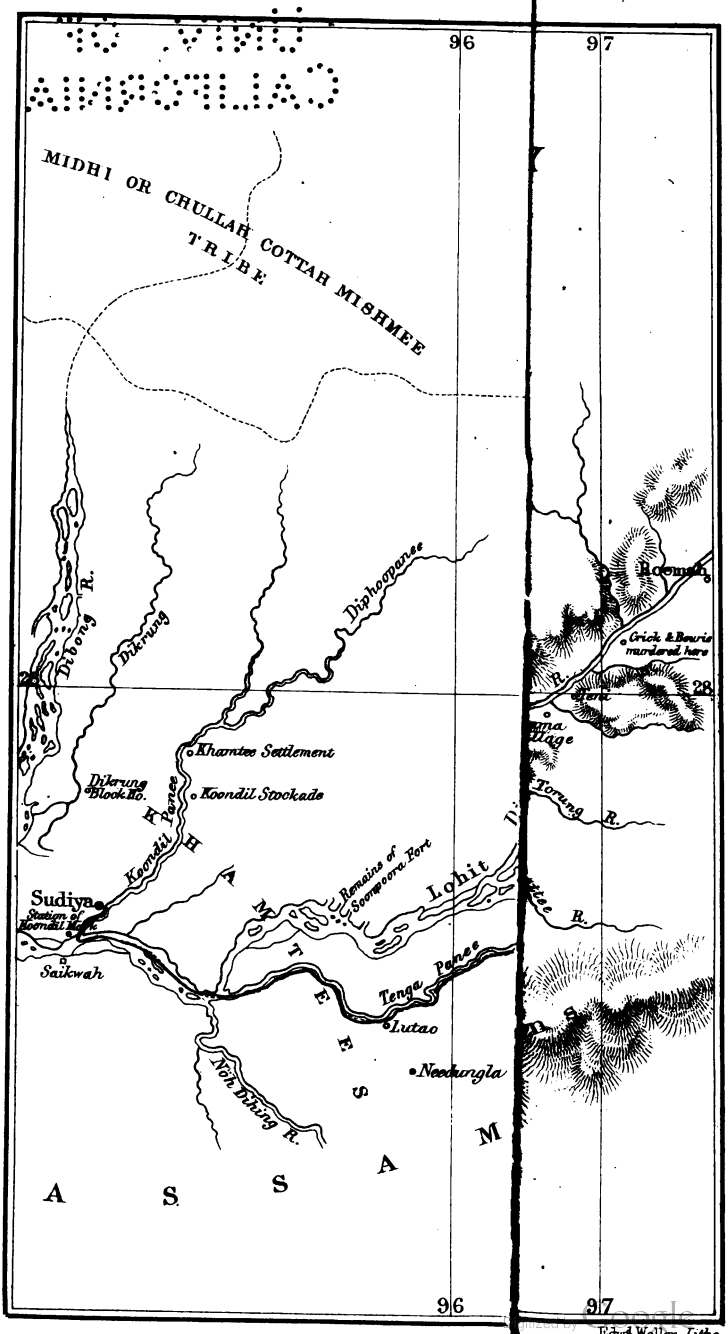
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NEW ROUTES FOR COMMERCE.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY.

Retrospect—Assam Tea for Thibet—Start for Calcutta—The 'Clan Alpine'—Fire! Fire!—Struggle for Boats—Brave Chinese Women—The Steamer Saved—Ships' Boats.

IT was in the firm belief that the extension of British commerce in China could alone lead to the establishment of that industrial progress among her people which is required to save them from decay as a nation, that the writer started from Shanghai on a pioneering journey. The object of this was, if possible, to determine a practicable trade route between India and China, whereby the millions of these neighbouring giant empires might enter into commercial intercourse. The details of that journey have been already submitted to the public; but in order to make clear the motive of the travels described in these pages, I may recall the fact that, at the end of six months, after passing safely through the Empire of China, from east to west, traversing the almost impass-

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able snowy ranges of Eastern Thibet, and running the gauntlet among the nomad Mongol banditti infesting the valleys of this wild frontier region, I found myself at the town of Bathang, some two hundred miles from Sudiya, the frontier post of Northern Assam. Although the journey had demonstrated the impracticability of a trade-route over the rugged mountains, covered with perpetual snow, yet a natural wish to be the first Englishman who had penetrated overland from China to India prompted the attempt to complete the interval which lay between Bathang and Sudiya. This attempt was foiled by the combined action of Chinese jealousy and the intolerance of the Lamas of Thibet.

For many centuries China has supplied Thibet with six or eight million pounds of brick tea annually. This article being a necessary of life to the Thibetans, the Chinese Government, who hold the wholesale monopoly of the export tea trade, have granted the retail monopoly to the Lama priests, who, by this means, hold the lay population of Thibet at their mercy. Thus the Chinese protect their tea trade, and the Lama priests their religious and political influence over the Thibetans. It is plain, therefore, that the opening up of commercial intercourse with the Europeans of Assam, that tea garden of India, would threaten at once the Chinese tea trade and the priestcraft of Lamanism; the English pioneer of commerce must therefore be prevented from reaching India at any hazard. Accordingly, I was arrested by two hundred Lama soldiers, obliged to change my route, and ultimately thrown into a Chinese prison in the city of Weisee foo,

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from which, having been rescued by the interference of some friendly tribes, I retraced my steps to Shanghai.

While travelling in Thibet, I had been struck with the vast importance of the tea trade between that country and China, and now the project of diverting at least a considerable portion of that trade to Assam from China forced itself upon me as at all events to be attempted.

A few weeks spent at Shanghai, amidst the kind hospitality of many warm friends, entirely removed all traces of the hardships endured during the previous twelve months, and I found myself already impatient to begin to attack Thibet on the side of Assam, hoping that the *espionage* of the Chinese might be evaded, and the way prepared for such intercourse between our Indian tea garden and Thibet as might hereafter result in an extensive trade.

As Calcutta was to be the starting-point, it was necessary to conduct thither my party, consisting of four individuals. First, faithful George Philip, a Chinese Christian, who, as interpreter, had shared all the difficulties and dangers of the previous journey, but who, nothing daunted by past perils, eagerly volunteered to accompany his master on the new undertaking. Next, a Thibetan boy, named Masu, about fourteen years of age, who could speak Chinese, and whom I had purchased of his mother for eight taels.* An assistant interpreter was added, named Owhalee, a Mahomedan, from Bombay, who, having served some years in the native army at Hankow, could speak Chinese fluently,

* A tael equal to 6*s.* 8*d.*

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and might thus prove a useful auxiliary in case of possible intercourse with Mahomedans from Yunnan. Lastly, a Chinese lad, named Lowtzang, who was engaged to act as general servant.

A free passage having been offered to myself and followers to Hong Kong by the kindness of my friend Mr. Dexwell, of the American firm, Messrs. A. Heard & Company, we embarked on board the good steamer 'Erl King,' and arrived safely at that port. Here we transhipped ourselves to the 'Clan Alpine,' bound for Calcutta, berths on board of this vessel having been placed at my disposal.

In these days of steam and travel, a voyage down the treacherous China Sea, through the Straits of Malacca, and up the Gulf of Bengal, is looked upon with as little interest as a trip across the German Ocean, save when the traveller chances to encounter one of the 'specialités' of those seas in the shape of a tai-fung,* or cyclone; then he feels conscious of such an awful warring of the elements, and such an intense desire to avoid like encounters for the future, as is sufficient to invest his voyage with an interest never to be forgotten.

Our voyage to Calcutta, though it was not rendered exciting by a tai-fung (as these convulsions of Nature only occur during the three hot months of June, July, and August), has, nevertheless, indelibly impressed itself on my mind.

We had left Hong Kong behind us two days, and the good steamer 'Clan Alpine' looked, as I watched

* Typhoon.

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her by the light of a full moon from a seat in one of the quarter boats, like some sporting mammoth rolling along the smooth surface of the sea.

It was a fine night, calm and quiet; even the booming sound of the paddles, as they beat the water, seemed less loud than usual. Ah! those glorious tropical nights spent on the ocean; who can remember them without unconsciously recalling their soothing effect? On this evening I retired to my cabin, feeling calmer than usual, for the cool and pleasant night had succeeded an exceedingly hot day. The long hours of the night had passed, and I was lying in that state between waking and sleeping, wherein sounds, though heard indistinctly, seem to repeat themselves like echoes—sometimes near, at other times far off.

In this way I had heard eight bells (four o'clock) struck, and the soft sound seemed floating away in the distance, when, in horrible contrast, an agonised yell caused me to leap from the berth, and rush on deck scarcely awake. All was still; but, looking towards the forepart of the vessel, I saw issuing from the forehatchway a long, bright column of fire. The shriek of 'Ho!' ('Fire!') which had roused me, had been uttered by one of the two hundred Chinese passengers on board.

Fascinated for a moment, I could not take my gaze off the flame as it leaped up perpendicularly through the calm morning air, while a lurid glare, lighting up the decks, grew in brightness as the flame increased in volume and roar.

Suddenly I spoke, as though addressing some one at

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my elbow, 'We are on fire,' then slowly descended to the cabin ; having dressed carefully, and secured my papers, watch, and revolver, I returned to the deck, where now confusion and terror reigned.

Above the moaning and screaming of some twenty Chinese women gathered about the cabin door, was heard the hoarse but loud voice of the captain giving orders to the crew of Calassees running about the decks, who, with terrified faces, rendered hideous by the glare of the fire, looked like demons attending on the fire-god, busy with the destruction of our vessel. I could not remain idle amidst such a scene, so hurried forward to the captain, who stood, pale but stern, directing the working of the fire-engines, and asked him if I could be of any use. Without taking his eyes off the flame which shot up through the hatchway in one unbroken roaring column, twenty feet high, he told me to go and look after the Chinese women, and keep them quiet ; having received his orders, I felt from that moment quite cool, and returned to the stern of the steamer.

It was just daylight, and the women recognising me at once surrounded and clung to me with all the energy of despair. They were now perfectly quiet and dumb with terror, while one or two of the elder women in hoarse whispers asked me to save them, and in trying to comfort the poor creatures I forgot my own fear, and succeeded in making them all sit down on the deck.

I had scarcely ceased explaining to them that their only safety depended on remaining perfectly still, when a slight breeze having sprung up caught the tall column

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of flame still roaring from the hold of the vessel, and forced it downwards along the deck. This drove the crew, hitherto engaged with the fire-engines and buckets, towards the stern. As the heat of the flame reached us, the calmness of my charges gave way, and, mixing with the now panic-stricken crew and Chinamen, they rushed to the boats.

The scene that ensued was horrible; the boats were crowded with twice as many as they could carry, and dozens of poor wretches, fearful lest they should be left behind, still struggled to get in, while the more fortunate occupants resisted them most savagely.

Seeing that it would be useless to enter any of the boats, I stood and contemplated the awful struggle for safety.

All order and discipline were at an end; those of the crew who could not succeed in getting into any of the boats made frantic efforts to lower them into the sea; each man worked independently of the other, so that some of the boats were dropped from the davits and smashed on touching the water, while another, suddenly let go at the bow, hung to the davits by the stern, and the crowd of people in her fell out and struggled together in the waves. Five of the six boats in the ship were thus rendered useless, and more than a hundred creatures were hanging on to ropes, hen-coops, and the oars and masts of the swamped boats floating round the ship which had lost her way, owing to the engines having been stopped on the breaking out of the fire.

The only remaining boat in the ship, a very large life-

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boat, lying on the guards of the paddle-box, had so far resisted the efforts of the people to launch her. When it appeared certain that the last and best boat in the ship was in danger of being lost, I hurried forward to the captain, who, with the European officers and engineers, were still bravely struggling with the flames, and told him that five boats were useless, and the last one in a fair way of being disabled; when he heard this he rushed aft to the arm rack, and bade me and my three Chinese, who kept close to us, and were perfectly calm, to arm ourselves with cutlasses and guard the lifeboat until his return.

There were two other passengers on board, so these gentlemen, together with myself and followers, after a short struggle with the men who were making frantic but idiotic efforts to launch the boat, succeeded in keeping possession of her until the captain and some of the engineers came, and in a cool manner set to work to launch her. This was soon effected, and six men were thrown into her, including my Chinese followers. The captain then desired his three passengers to follow, and placed me in charge, with orders to pull off from the ship, and commanded me not to approach until he beckoned. He and his officers then returned to the fire.

When we had got away from the ship, the yells and curses of those on board were dreadful, and a hundred hands were held up, some entreating us to return, and others cursing us for leaving them. The minutes that we lay off that burning ship were most painful; a number of despairing fellow-creatures were left there with no

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other alternative than death by fire or water, while we in the boat were at least only exposed to gradual starvation on the open sea.

Any impulse to try and save the lives of those on board was stifled by the knowledge that if our boat approached the side of the vessel a hundred desperate creatures would throw themselves into it and swamp her. Thus for nearly two hours did we lie off the burning ship, watching the maddened antics of those despairing ones on her decks.

In the meanwhile we were joined by another boat, one of those swamped in launching, which had been baled out by the Chinese women, a number of whom, clinging to the davit ropes, gallantly helped themselves, while a crowd of men ran about the decks utterly helpless. I was greatly pleased to see the women comparatively safe under the care of the third officer. Their bravery in rescuing this boat was grand; they had run great risk in the successful attempt, and one only out of the twenty on board was drowned.

At last the volume of smoke from the vessel began to clear away, and we could see the Europeans calmly at work about the decks; shortly the smoke died away altogether. Then a cheer rang out from the plucky men who had saved our ship from the flames, and the captain hailed us from the paddle-box. On going alongside he told us that the steamer had a great deal of water in her, and to prevent the boiler fires being drowned, it was necessary that her engines should be set in motion, to pump the water out.

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Having told this welcome news, he desired me to pull round and pick up as many of the people who were floating about on oars and spars, &c., as we could take into the lifeboat. This was a pleasant task, and we soon had our boat so full that for safety we were obliged to make for the steamer, which steamed round us in a circle, to get rid of our living freight. This done, we picked up the rest, and then were taken on board again.

The vessel looked a wreck, but she was soon cleaned up, and by noon we were steaming away on our voyage.

From subsequent inquiries it was ascertained that the fire originated in the fore-hold, which was filled with crates of Chinese crockeryware packed with straw, and among these a Celestial had stowed himself away for the purpose of enjoying his opium smoke, and the little lamp used for lighting the opium having been overturned after he fell asleep, set fire to the straw.

Considering the length of time that the fire burned, and the combustible material which fed it, the ship suffered little damage; the woodwork of her fore compartment was nearly all burnt, some of the beams nearly through, while the deck in some places was warped, from the heat below, and the cargo in this part of the vessel was entirely destroyed.

Our casualties, considering the frightful panic of the Chinese and crew of Calassees, were very few; if I remember rightly, nine persons were reported to have been drowned, among whom was only one woman.

But for the calm prevailing, the loss of life would have been dreadful; and but for this fact, and the great

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bravery of the European officers on board, as fine a vessel as ever floated would have been lost, and, in all human probability, I should not have lived to tell the tale, for we were three hundred miles from the nearest land.

Considering the number of souls constantly afloat on the ocean, hundreds of miles away from land, and the accidents so frequently occurring which render the safety of the passengers dependent on boats, a brief digression on the subject of ships' boats may be excused.

Having made perhaps as many as thirty voyages in as many different ships, I have never felt in any one case that, had it been necessary to take to the boats, we should have been saved by them.

Twice I have been in a position in which it was necessary to lower boats. Once on a voyage up the China Sea, when, our vessel having struck on a coral reef off the Paracel group of islands, two of the three boats on board were lowered, but one had the plug out, and filled before she got away from the ship's side, and the other was so leaky that two men were kept baling the whole time that she was employed in laying out an anchor.

In the case of the 'Clan Alpine,' although her boats were fitted with oars, masts, water kegs, and lockers, there was neither bread nor water on board of them, and if the fire had spread rapidly we should scarcely have had time or opportunity to get provisions on board. In many other cases I have known that not a

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single boat in the ship has been in readiness for lowering, and many times on board our great ocean steamers I have trembled at the knowledge that much precious time would be lost in provisioning boats, were any emergency to require their use.

I often thought that the pleasure of the voyage would have been greater had I known that every boat had bread and water in her. There is no reason why every ship's boat should not be fitted up with oars, masts, and air-tight provision lockers, kept constantly full; nor why a weekly inspection of boats should not take place on board of every ship, especially on our mail steamers, and the result of such inspection be entered in the log-book, on the responsibility of the captain. It would add to the efficiency of the boats in case of need, which is greatly to be desired.

In less than ten days after the occurrence of the fire we arrived at Calcutta, where I was soon hospitably entertained by one of the merchant princes of India.

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CHAPTER II.

A SPORTING EPISODE.

Indian Oriental Character—Introduction to Lord Mayo—The Viceroy on Trade-routes—A Shooting Expedition—The Camp—Pigsticking—Chase of a Leopard—A Brave old Boar—My first Tiger—A desperate Charge—The Wounded Mahout—Return.

IT was just ten years since I had quitted India, as a very young man, carrying away loose and hastily-formed impressions of the country and people. Amongst the most distinct remembrances of that first visit were those which probably most young men take with them after a year or two spent in the country, namely, that it is very hot, and that mosquitoes and niggers were created solely for the annoyance of Europeans. Even now, my opinion as to the final cause of the insect is unchanged; but with regard to the nigger he exists no more in my mind; in his stead there is the man, representative of the millions who collectively compose a great, industrious, and peaceable people.

This change in opinion as to the native of India was not the result of impressions hastily formed on again landing in the country, but rather the conclusion derived from a long intercourse with the peoples of other great

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Oriental countries—the Burmese, Malays, Chinese, and Japanese.

Residence among them, and also a slight knowledge of their languages, have enabled me to appreciate the Oriental character. Everywhere superstitious, more or less ignorant, and extremely sensitive to the slightest wrong; when roused by real or fancied injustice, or an insult to their religious prejudices, turbulent, and cruel in the extreme; but where governed with justice and properly protected, always peace-loving, industrious, law-abiding, and contented. Nowhere in the East will this opinion receive stronger confirmation than in British India, in spite of occasional flashes from the fast-expiring flame of fanaticism, and the excusable pride of the rising generation, conscious of its growing freedom from the prejudice and ignorance of ages.

Some may consider the mention of these impressions of Oriental character somewhat stale and unprofitable, but they are recorded under the deep conviction that to this view of the Oriental character, and by acting on it, are owing the success and safety with which I have travelled amongst many peoples and tribes of Asia.

A day or two after arriving at Calcutta, an official invitation to dine at Government House brought me, for the first time, into personal intercourse with that distinguished Viceroy, the lamented Earl of Mayo. Death gives the survivors the privilege of paying, without being charged with adulation, their tribute of admiration to departed greatness. Thus I may recall the urbanity of the kindly host and the thoughtful interest of the illus-

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trious statesman, which combined to elicit many stories of the travels in China of which he had heard, and the hopes of the projected journey. While expressing his regret that the Government could not identify itself with this scheme, he displayed the warmest interest in the question of trade-routes between China and India, and desired my attendance the next day for a more thorough discussion of the subject.

Attending at Government House at the time appointed, I found his Excellency and several distinguished officials of his Government ready to enter upon the subject, the importance of which had evidently impressed itself on the great mind which then influenced the destinies of India. His Excellency at once led the way to a table, on which lay a large map of Asia, and for nearly an hour sharply catechised me on all the countries I had visited.

Population, products, routes, rivers, and mountains were all noticed with an accuracy which showed a knowledge of Asiatic geography very unusual; never before or since have I conversed with any person, on the subject of trade-routes in Asia, who was more completely at home on this topic than Lord Mayo. At the termination of the interview, his lordship thanked me for the information afforded, and, with a warm shake of the hand, assured me of his hearty good wishes for my future success.

While writing these pages, after a rest from the self-imposed task of trying to carry the blessings of commerce to the more secluded peoples of Asia, I feel rich

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in the remembrance that my humble endeavours gained the sympathy and approval of so great a man as the late Lord Mayo.

As business would compel me to remain in Calcutta for a month or so, before finally setting out, my host proposed a shooting expedition up country; and as Bengal tigers were to be our game, I eagerly embraced the opportunity of seeing a little tiger-shooting.

The district of Maldah was to be the scene of our exploits, and the other members of the party were to rendezvous on the banks of the Ganges, above Rampore Boleah, from which point we were to shoot along the banks of the river inland, as far as the ruins of the old city of Maldah.

All preparations having been made, Mr. Skinner and myself left Calcutta by rail, and at the end of a day's journey, visited one of his indigo plantations, near the banks of the Ganges; a short ride next morning brought us to the river, where a large boat awaited us, embarking on board of which we continued up river, and reached the rendezvous late in the afternoon.

Several of the party had already arrived, and the camp, which was pitched under some large tamarind trees on the river bank, presented a most lively scene.

In and out of a spacious tent erected under the shade of one of the largest trees, the native servants were hurrying in all the bustle of preparing dinner for the sahibs, while some twenty elephants, lazily swinging their trunks, and attended by their noisy mahouts, were picketed here and there under the trees. In the back-

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ground were the horses of our party picketed in twos and threes, with their syces rubbing them down, while a large party of grass-cutters, each bearing a bundle of grass on her head, stood round screaming at the syces, who, intent on driving a bargain, called them all sorts of names, amidst much laughing and bantering on both sides.

The river, too, presented a busy scene. A number of boats, like the one in which we had arrived, with large cabins on deck, were being washed down after the day's sail, while the smoke from a little fireplace in the stern of each spoke of active preparations in the cooking line.

These boats, which are used by the Europeans for river conveyances all along the Ganges, were to be our sleeping places, and very comfortable they were, the cabin being fitted up with tables, chests of drawers, bed-places with mosquito curtains and bath-rooms; in fact, every convenience that can render life pleasant in a boat.

Among the sahibs, the spirit of freemasonry which seems to make all sportsmen brothers, speedily exercised its wonted genial influence; we all knew each other, and felt as though we had been friends for years. After a chat on the prospect of sport, some took a dip in the Ganges, and others set to work to arrange their boats for the night.

After the evening toilet, the usual sherry and bitters was handed round in each boat, and then we adjourned to the tent for dinner.

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Oh, what a dinner that was! As we warmed to the good cheer, several capital shikar yarns were told, some calling forth hearty laughter from the quaint manner of the narrator; while others sent the blood coursing through our veins, as each exciting incident was related, and drew forth many a silent prayer that we too might meet with some such adventures—prayers that for some of us were answered to the fullest extent of our heart's desire.

Thus, amidst exciting tales of narrow escapes while pig-sticking and tiger-shooting, the night drew on, until our host, with the keen foresight of a thorough sportsman, suggested bed; so after 'just one more glass,' we took our way to the boats.

In spite of numerous mosquitoes which had forced their way through the curtains, I slept well, and dreamed of happy hunting-grounds, tigers, elephants, guns, and deer, which eventually seemed all jumbled together in a confusion of legs, trunks, stripes, and gun barrels, ending in a loud report, which awakened me, to find that it was broad daylight, and that one of the party had fired off his gun close to our boat.

I was soon dressed and on shore; our camp was all astir, seven elephants, each equipped with its howdah, stood waiting for as many sahibs to mount, while numbers of villagers, engaged as beaters, were loitering about, each armed with a long stick or spear. As no pig-sticking was to be done on this the first day out, the syces were unpicketing the horses, and preparing to leave for the next camping place, some ten miles farther up the river.

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After breakfast, having stowed rifles and ammunition in the howdahs, the party mounted, and filed out of camp—and a goodly company we were; first, the seven sahibs, each sitting in his howdah with a servant behind him; next, about twenty elephants to be used in beating; then the horses of the party, each led by its syce and followed by a grass-cutter; and lastly a crowd of native beaters.

About a mile from camp the sport began in a long stretch of grass country, where the line of elephants disturbed great numbers of black partridges and small deer.

It was the first time that I had ever tried to shoot from the howdah, and it was very difficult to maintain my balance, but before the day was over, I got my "howdah legs," and had bagged a few partridge and snipe.

As we were not yet in good shikar ground, we camped early in the afternoon; most of the party were pretty well tired, and turned-in early after dinner.

For a day or two capital sport was met with at deer and partridge, and the good shots soon came to the front, but we had not yet come across the traces of any tigers, so it was proposed to give the elephants a day's rest and turn out for some pig-sticking; and five of the party, including myself, set off early in the morning for a stretch of thick grass jungle about two miles from camp.

In default of a horse, I mounted a pad elephant to accompany the others, and beat up pigs, taking a fowling-piece, in the hopes of picking up some snipe and black partridge.

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Our ground was soon reached, and having collected a number of beaters, we began work by beating up a nullah, or deep dry bed of a stream, thickly overgrown with tall reeds and grass, running for some distance through the plain. Scarcely had we entered the nullah before the rustling of the grass and reeds ahead, and angry trumpeting of the elephant, gave warning that game was afoot. The horses of the expectant spearsmen who followed us along the banks of the nullah became very excited, while their riders settled themselves firmly in their saddles, preparatory to a dash after the pigs which might bolt from cover at any moment.

Thus we kept on, the noise of the beaters and trumpeting of my elephant increasing at every fresh rush ahead, until we arrived almost at the head of the nullah.

We were now apparently quite close on the pig, for it was with some difficulty that my mahout could induce his timid elephant to proceed; however, a determined application of his sharp-pointed iron goad made the animal rush forward with an angry screech, and then, with a magnificent bound, a fine leopard sprang out into the plain.

This was an unexpected treat for the pig-stickers; the chance of spearing a leopard from horseback does not occur every day, and plenty of law was given to the game. Then the spears were poised, and away the three horsemen dashed after his spotted excellency.

For about five hundred yards the chase was most exciting, and it seemed as if the fate of the leopard was

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sealed, for one of the party was close on it. Suddenly, however, the cunning brute doubled back and succeeded in reaching the nullah. This was a great disappointment, as all our efforts to get him out in the open again proved unavailing; the beast doubled backwards and forwards under the feet of my elephant, refusing to break cover.

More than an hour was spent in trying to beat him out, until, at last, the patience of the party being exhausted, it was suggested that I should shoot it. This was not an easy matter, as the long grass and reeds in the nullah were so thick that I could only now and then catch a glimpse of a few spots as he doubled past me. At last, however, after one or two ineffectual shots, I spied the sulky animal crouched under the bank of the nullah, within a couple of yards of my elephant's trunk. His fate was sealed, for, as he afforded me a fair sight, a charge of No. 8 shot reached his heart, and he rolled into the bottom of the nullah quite dead.

When he was brought out into the open he proved to be a nearly full-grown male, and very fat. The villagers who made up our party of beaters recognised him as the thief who had wrought considerable havoc amongst their herds for some time past, and hailed his inanimate form with shouts of derision. Such was the beginning of this day's sport.

Having placed the leopard on the elephant, we struck off into the plain for a batch of high grass, where, as luck would have it, we put up a fine sounder of pig, and away went the horsemen in chase. One or two fair-

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sized pigs were speared, and what with the excitement of the sport and the delightful coolness of the day, the spirits of the party rose high, and the death-wound of every boar was hailed by the native beaters, who saw visions of a great feast, with loud shouts of delight.

Continuing on across the plain, we reached another batch of high grass. The beaters were scarcely into it when a sounder of pig broke cover. Each rider singled out his boar, and dashed after it. One of the party, L——, a noted spear in Bengal, being better mounted than the other two, got away after a splendid old boar at a terrific pace; for nearly a mile L——'s fine Australian horse did his best, but the old boar held his own very pluckily. It really was a hard race, and at one time it seemed, as I watched it from the top of the elephant, that piggy would get the best of it; but he had a bold and determined spear behind him, and it soon became evident that the horse was gaining.

The boar, perceiving that he could not reach fresh cover, doubled back towards his old haunt, and then it became a race of life and death for him. He had done his best, and every stride now brought L—— closer to him, until at last horse and boar raced alongside each other, so close that the long flakes of foam blown from the jaws of the pig dotted the flanks of the horse. Now was the time; L——, rising in his stirrups, gave a mighty thrust as his horse shot past the quarry. The boar, deeply stricken, but too far behind the shoulder, stopped short, while L——, unable to withdraw his spear, passed on, leaving it sticking upright in the body of the boar.

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By this time the rest of the party had advanced to within a few hundred yards of L——, who rode up for another spear, and then returned to the encounter.

The boar had stood champing his teeth in impotent rage from the time of his being struck, but when he perceived L—— coming towards him again the game old patriarch charged right gallantly. L—— met him, and delivered another thrust which only seemed to increase the anger of the boar. And now a running fight was kept up; time after time was L—— charged, and each time was the boar received on his spear. In the meanwhile, another of the party came up, after having despatched his pig; he happened to be mounted on a pony which, refused to face the savage-looking enemy, so he changed his mount for an iron-grey mare, apparently a griffin at her work, for in the first charge the boar inflicted a nasty cut on her off hind leg, and thus disposed of his new enemy.

Again L——, on his splendid Australian, came to the charge. The boar, though weak from loss of blood, still came gallantly on; but as he rose to L——'s spear he tottered, and, staggering a yard or two, fell, and rolled over dead.

A more gallant encounter than this I never witnessed. The savage and determined gameness of the boar was only equalled by the horseman's cool daring; and I think, of all manly and brave sports, that of pig-sticking, as practised by English shikaries in India, bears off the palm.

As it was now long past midday, and all were satisfied

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with the bag, we returned to camp, where the rest of the party had already assembled for tiffin. After this meal we adjourned to the boats to clean our rifles and prepare for the morrow, as some native shikaries had brought in khubber (news) of a tiger lying in a nullah a few miles from camp.

All were astir early next morning, and after a hurried breakfast the howdahs were fixed, ammunition and lunch stowed away, and the party started in quest of his striped majesty.

The shikaries who had brought the news soon led us to the nullah where the game had been seen. Here a council was held by the veterans of our party, and the programme of proceedings arranged.

We were divided into two parties, stationed along either side of the nullah, at distant points where the cover was thinnest, so as to get a shot as the tiger retreated before the beaters. When each had taken up his station, the elephants entered the head of the nullah and commenced beating down. We were soon aware that game was afoot. The elephants' keen scent discovered the tiger, but somehow or other he managed to steal away to another nullah, and it was not until late in the day, when most of the party were dismounted for lunch, that the report of a rifle some distance ahead, accompanied by loud shouts and the sharp angry screech of the elephants, told us that the first tiger had been bagged.

When the successful sahib joined us, we learnt that it had been an easy kill—one ball through the shoulder had laid low a magnificent male tiger, which shortly made its appearance on the back of an elephant.

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Having admired its proportions, we were on the point of mounting again, to make our way towards camp and fill up the bag with a few deer and partridges, when two natives were seen hurrying towards us, shouting 'Bagh! bagh!' (tiger). This was welcome news, and we soon learned that they had just seen a large tiger take to a nullah not a quarter of a mile distant. Our party were speedily *en route* for his majesty's domain, and on arriving at the nullah the order of battle was again formed. Before the beaters had been at work half an hour the report of a rifle some distance down the nullah announced that the enemy had made his appearance. After a few minutes' silence, a shout informed us that the shot was unsuccessful, and that the tiger had doubled back. Presently a great hubbub among the elephants in the nullah, and the shouts of the frightened mahouts, announced that the tiger was amongst them, and there he remained, apparently determined not to budge.

It so happened that I was stationed on the side of the nullah close to the beaters, and from my howdah I could see all that took place. The tiger lay in some long reeds, and refused to budge. The elephants, one after the other, declined to face him, and it appeared that his majesty intended quietly to remain where he was. At last, however, a huge male elephant, which, from its savage temper, had been purposely kept in the background, was brought to the attack by his mahout, a thin, withered old man. It was grand to see the wrath of the elephant. Holding his trunk aloft, and swaying about his mighty legs, he stood for a minute or so uttering terrific roars, until, becoming perfectly frantic, he dashed into the reeds and

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literally lifted the tiger on his enormous tusks, and threw him right out of the nullah into the open.

I had a fair right and left shot, but my excitement was so great that I made a clean miss. A perfect shower of balls was sent after the tiger as he made a short run in the open, but he reached the nullah, where, plunging out of sight for a moment, he reappeared at the opposite bank, and made off across country, giving me another chance. A ball from my second barrel reached him, and broke his spine: this sealed his fate. Our host, who was on the opposite bank, went up to him as he sat with his hind-quarters paralysed and the rest of his body raised on his fore-legs, looking magnificently defiant, and quietly despatched him by putting a ball through his head.

Satisfied with our first bag of tigers, we returned to camp late in the evening, tremendously hungry and very proud of our day's work.

While we were at dinner both the tigers were brought into camp, attended by a great crowd of villagers, who had gathered from all the villages within miles of us, and the moment that the tigers were taken off the elephants the crowd made a rush and commenced fighting amongst themselves for the tigers' whiskers, which the natives of India consider a sovereign preventive against sickness.

During the next two days two other tigers were shot, but being easy kills did not afford great sport. At the end of this time four of our party of seven men were obliged to return, leaving only our host, M——, and myself.

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For a day or two we had some capital sport; the bag gradually swelled to deer, black partridge, and chicere, another bird of the partridge tribe; but we could get nothing in the way of royalty for several days. At last, however, we were rewarded for our trouble.

On the third morning after the separation of our party, we commenced beating some high grass country in the hope of finding an outlying tiger, but for several hours nothing was found save an occasional deer, and we were beginning to despair of finding any more tigers, when we unexpectedly came on a likely-looking nullah curving through the plain in a horse-shoe shape. The look of the country was decidedly tigerish, and sent a thrill of hope through us. A council was at once held, and M——, who knew the country, was constituted master of the ceremonies.

The beating elephants were formed into line, and a mahout on an elephant stationed at the head of the nullah. I was sent off to the bend of the nullah, while our host and M—— kept along the banks just in front of the beaters.

To reach my post I had to cross to the opposite bank, and in the passage over I observed the pugs of what appeared to be an enormous tiger. Stopping to examine them, I was startled by a crash among the reeds. The tiger was afoot, so I gave the signal, but as it was not understood, the party kept on beating towards me.

Scarcely had the beaters reached me when the mahout at the head of the nullah began shouting and waving his turban. Looking towards him, we saw a splendid

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tiger bounding across the plain, making his way to the other end of the nullah.

Again M—— marshalled his beaters, and made for the point where the tiger had taken cover, while I again took up my old position at the bend.

For half an hour or so I watched the beaters steadily working up the nullah, every inch of which was carefully explored. From the screeching of the elephants it was plain that the tiger was just in front of them, and evidently sulky at being so much disturbed.

Every minute now seemed an age, and Philip, who did not seem to relish such sport, observed that Englishmen were strange men to kill tigers for fun; in his country no one would do this kind of thing—it was worse than fighting men.

At last, the tiger broke cover in front of M——, the report of whose rifle announced the fact. The tiger kept on in a straight line towards me, his track being clearly traced in the tall grass shaking as he bounded through it. Another shot from our host's rifle seemed to quicken the noble brute's pace, and he dashed into the nullah within fifteen yards of me.

The very high grass of the plain had as yet prevented me from seeing the tiger, and now, though within fifteen yards, I could only tell his whereabouts by the shaking of the reeds, as he lashed them with an angry sweep of his tail.

It was evident that the beast was sulky, and meant mischief. He allowed the elephants almost to walk over him before he broke cover again; then he sprang out

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with an angry roar, and clearing, with one bound, an open space, crashed into the nullah again. I scarcely know whether it was fear or speechless admiration for the terrific rage of the animal that rendered my arm powerless; certain it is that I fired too late, and missed him, and he again crouched in the reeds, within twenty yards of me, uttering low angry growls. The elephants, however, again pressed on him, and he retreated slowly before them, still growling most ominously.

In the meanwhile I followed on the opposite bank of the nullah, and M—— had scarcely finished warning me to be on the look-out for a charge, when, with a terrific bound and fierce roar, the tiger sprang from the nullah and charged my elephant.

I pulled both barrels, but missed, and then the fierce brute fastened on to the roots of the elephant's trunk and commenced worrying him; the poor elephant screeched most piteously, and made frantic efforts to shake off his relentless enemy, but with no avail; the cruel fangs were deep in his trunk, and huge sharp claws were lacerating his breast.

I was nearly shaken out of the howdah; the elephant every now and then went down on his knees, trying to crush the tiger, which obliged me to hold on with one hand, while I tried to extract the cartridges from my rifle with the other; as luck would have it, the cartridges stuck hard and fast, and resisted my most frantic efforts to draw them. All this time the tiger seemed bent on killing the elephant, whose ear was all torn, and the huge brute literally began to stagger from the loss of the

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blood streaming from its trunk. At last, I threw down the rifle, and snatched my fowling-piece from Philip, who held it ready. The difficulty now was to get a shot. I was obliged to hold on to the howdah with one hand, while I leant over the front, holding the gun with the other hand; in this way I fired off both barrels, and missed the tiger, but the smoke in his face made him let go his hold, and he staggered back into the nullah, reached the opposite bank, and, before our host was aware that the tiger had left me, it had fastened on to his elephant. He made a good shot, and struck him in the head, but the ball somehow glanced off, only stunning the brute, which rolled over, but, immediately recovering itself, sprang on the elephant again from behind; failing to get a firm hold, he fell again, and then, looking about him, caught sight of M——'s elephant, which he immediately charged, but a well-directed ball sickened him, and he turned off into the jungle, carrying with him another ball from M——'s rifle.

Meanwhile, as soon as my elephant found himself free, he made a bolt for it, crossed the nullah, and scuttled off for five hundred yards before the mahout could stop him, but at last, after great difficulty, we got the frightened beast round again.

As we were hurrying back to the party, the mahout called my attention to his leg, which had been fearfully lacerated by the claws of the tiger; the calf seemed almost torn off, and the blood was streaming from him, so I gave him my pocket-handkerchief to tie above his knee to prevent more loss of blood, and by the time he

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had fastened it on we reached the scene of action. A few yards from M——, in a patch of long grass, the tiger had sought refuge, and apparently lay very quiet, for the grass was perfectly still, so we all reloaded, and approached the enemy in line; we came upon him, but all was over, there he lay stretched out in all his magnificent proportions—quite dead.

Before dismounting, however, we fired another volley at him to make sure, and then gave vent to a triumphant cheer. My mahout turned to me, and pointing first to his leg and then to the tiger, observed, 'Sahib, I can die now that that devil is dead.'

We all felt that we had killed a royal Bengal tiger, and such a one as few shikaries meet with; he had charged us all one after the other, and died game to the last, after giving nearly two hours' hard work.

He proved an enormous full-grown male, measuring eleven feet two inches from tip to tip, and beautifully marked, and so heavy that the joint efforts of three mahouts proved insufficient to lift him on to the elephant.

My mahout was now in such a bad way that I was obliged to take him off to camp, ten miles distant, on a spare elephant. The poor fellow soon fainted from loss of blood, and I was obliged to sit near him the whole distance to keep the flies off his leg, which soon began to swell horribly. Philip, upon whom the encounter had made a great impression, amused me very much as we rode along, by delivering in his "pidgin" English, such remarks as, 'Truly, master, you Englishmen are curious men. Do you really feel a pleasure in such dreadful

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scenes as these? truly suppose I never have see this, my no can believe. Ah, Chinamen never can do this kind of business, he heart too small.'

Late in the afternoon we reached camp with the wounded mahout, and managed to wash and dress his wounds a little, and administer a slight stimulant. Soon after, the rest of the party came in, with the tiger and the wounded elephant; and as the news of our terrific encounter had spread rapidly through the country, hundreds of village people accompanied them.

The mahout was at once despatched down-river to Rampore Boleah Hospital, where I afterwards saw him fast recovering from his wounds, and the elephant was sent to a village close by to be taken care of until he recovered. Such was my last day's tiger-hunting in Bengal.

Next morning we turned our heads homewards, intending to move slowly and do a little pig-sticking on the way, but unfortunately, in crossing the Ganges, a beautiful little Arab horse, belonging to our host, jumped overboard and was drowned; this threw a damper over us all, and we decided on returning to Rampore Boleah, whence I continued on to Calcutta, wishing to complete my preparations for the start towards Thibet.

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CHAPTER III.

PREPARATIONS.

The Calcutta Chamber of Commerce—Rival Trade Routes—A Liberal Vote—Government Expeditions—Mules Wanted—Hurdwah Fair—My Own Muleteer—Hoaxing a Landlord—Start for Assam.

AT Calcutta I found an invitation from the Chamber of Commerce, to attend a meeting of the members, convened for the purpose of discussing the subject of overland trade-routes with China.

Of the two routes proposed as best suited for trade communication, the meeting seemed most inclined to adopt that between Talifoo and Bhamo, to which latter place the expedition commanded by Major Sladen had just returned. In the absence of any published report of their proceedings, the notion had in some way gained ground that the opening of this route would benefit Calcutta, though it was hard to conceive on what grounds. Taking Rangoon as the seaport of Burmah, through which British commerce, consisting mainly of piece goods, would find its way to Bhamo, *vid* the Irrawaddy, and thence by way of Bhamo to Yunnan, it was natural to suppose that Burmah would be benefited by the transit of an extensive trade along her great water highway, but that

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India could in any way compete or take part with Burmah in the trade with China, I could not understand.

With regard to the other route, a memorial had recently been addressed to Government by some influential members of the commercial body, praying for the survey of a line of country from the north-east corner of Assam, through the Hookung Valley, in the north of Burmah, to Bhamo, advocated by the late Mr. F. A. Goodenough and Mr. R. S. Mangles, with the view of making the Bramapootra river the highway of a trade from China, having its *entrepôt* at Calcutta. The Indian Government had declined to act on this memorial until the result of my journey from China towards India should be known; hence the courteous invitation which I received from the Chamber to attend their meeting.

When called upon to state my views to the Chamber, I had little difficulty in convincing the members that Calcutta could never take part in any overland trade with China. In the first place, Western China has not produce sufficient to maintain a considerable export trade, and the only trade that can ever spring up in that direction will be, as already observed, the importation of piece goods through Rangoon.

As to the route from Northern Assam to Western China, the cooly labourers so much needed in Assam might emigrate by such a road, but trade would not pass the Irrawaddy, to travel three hundred miles overland, and then descend the Bramapootra to Calcutta, thus traversing a distance as great as that from Bhamo to

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the port of Rangoon, so that for all practicable purposes this trade-route advocated by Messrs. Goodenough and Mangles is useless.

The Chamber, while fully concurring in this view, was keenly alive to the importance of securing the sale in Thibet of Assam teas, and thus developing the resources of the country, in which an enormous capital had been sunk, but rendered unproductive by the want of labour and a profitable market.

When it was fully explained that this was the object of my intended journey, on the motion of the President a sum of six thousand rupees was unanimously voted towards defraying the cost of the expedition. Thus I found myself in a position to commence the final preparations for the journey on such a scale as would render success certain if money alone could secure it.

The discussion at this meeting gave me ample food for reflection on the theory of Government expeditions, as illustrated by the circumstances attendant on the progress of that recently despatched to Yunnan. I could not help asking myself whether the experience of the merchant founders of our Indian Empire should not have taught their present representatives to rely on the energy of commerce to force its way unaided, instead of appealing to Government to make a trade for them. Surely military officers, burdened with the weight of political responsibility, and encumbered rather than protected by military escorts and the parade necessary to keep up the dignity of their Sovereign, are not fit for the slow plodding process of fostering trade, or

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impressing a strange people with the idea that our object in approaching them is simply the exchange of produce. Such expeditions are, I submit, with every respect for the British merchant, much more likely to confirm the impression that we are a nation of conquerors, and as such must be treated with reserve and suspicion. Let *bonâ fide* English traders take an example from Mr. Shaw, who lately carried his teas to Yarkand, and carry their goods from all our Indian possessions to China, Thibet, and any neighbouring country that will take them at a paying price, open up trade by degrees in this way, and wherever it can find a footing then let the influence of the British power protect it. In this way only can Government interfere in such matters with benefit to the merchant; let the trader go first, then the influence of his Government, and then the teaching of the Missionary, if so be that such enthusiasts must needs follow.

In thus condemning the practice in vogue of late years among our mercantile communities, of petitioning Government to explore first one trade-route and then the other, I would wish it to be distinctly understood that my remarks are not intended to cast any slur upon officers, either civil or military, who have been engaged in such undertakings. I only contend that Government expeditions, from the nature of their organization and the political responsibility attaching to them, are totally unfit instruments to be used in giving strength to new-born trade.

It was now the middle of April, and no time was to be lost in completing all preparations for our departure for Assam.

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The plan resolved on was to proceed to Northern Assam by steamer, and on arriving at Sudiya, the remotest British frontier station, to accompany some of the numerous parties of hill tribes which annually attend a fair at this place, to their country in the Mishmee hills, and thence to get as far into Thibet as possible before the snows set in, and then go into winter quarters until the following spring, when, as the snows melted, I could proceed towards Bathang.

To carry out this programme, it was declared, by men supposed to be well acquainted with the country, that it was necessary to provide baggage animals before leaving Calcutta, as nothing of that kind could be procured in Assam; while the prospect of being able to hire men to act as porters from Sudiya was uncertain, the Assamese as well as the Mishmee tribes being very averse to carrying burdens. Moreover, I knew that the jealousy of the Lama priests in Thibet would render it impossible for me to purchase mules or any other means of conveyance in that country. Experience had likewise taught me that nothing but mules could face the mountainous country lying between Assam and Bathang.

It was no easy matter to buy animals suited to my purpose in Calcutta. After beating up all the horse dealers and livery stables, and advertising in the papers for a week, but one mule was brought for inspection, and this was a huge animal, standing nearly fourteen hands, much too large for my purpose, as I wanted nothing over twelve hands, small mules being much more handy to load and unload than large ones.

When almost in despair of getting any animals,

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I happened to mention my difficulty to a gentleman who had just returned from up-country, who thereupon told me that a regiment of Native Cavalry, stationed at Umballah, had a number of baggage mules to dispose of. This was certainly an opportunity; but as Umballah was far away in the Punjaub, the idea of purchasing mules there, and then bringing them all the way to Calcutta, seemed out of the question. True, there was a railroad the whole distance; but the expense of carriage was a serious obstacle. Here, however, the good offices of my kind friend, the late Mr. F. A. Goodenough, stood me in great stead. On his mentioning my difficulty to the manager of the Calcutta and Delhi Railway, that gentleman very courteously offered a free pass to Delhi and back, for myself, servants, and eight mules.

Thus, in order to procure baggage animals, it was necessary to travel over two thousand miles. Fifteen years ago, I could scarcely have accomplished this distance in India within a year. Now it is a matter of a week.

My party was now diminished by the discharge of Owhalee, the second interpreter, who had turned out to be an inveterate drunkard.

During my first expedition in China and Eastern Thibet, I had often talked to my faithful follower, Philip, of railways in Europe, especially when we would camp in the evening, entirely exhausted after a long and tedious day's march, in which we had probably not made more than ten miles in a direct line towards our destina-

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tion. Philip's delight, therefore, in the anticipation of a long journey by rail, was very great, and as Masu and Lowtzang were equally desirous to behold the wonders of the iron road, I took them to look after the mules.

Though I could ill afford the time necessary to make the journey to Umballah, I was not altogether sorry to have an opportunity of seeing Delhi and the other famous cities of India. I therefore proposed to go to Umballah direct, and, having purchased the mules, to bring them back by easy stages, and make a flying visit to Cawnpore and Allahabad. A journey of two days and two nights landed us at Delhi very dusty and tired.

Leaving Delhi shortly after daylight next morning, we continued on to Hurdwah, where the great annual fair was being held—the resort of thousands of pilgrims from all parts of the country, who flock to the place for the purpose of bathing in the sacred waters of the Ganges.

Fakeers in all stages of religious fanaticism are to be seen dragging their gaunt bodies along in a sleepy listless manner, stopping occasionally to glare with religious hate on some European attending the fair, either for the purpose of sight-seeing, or, like myself, in quest of a mount from amongst the numerous droves of horses and mules offered for sale by Persian horse-dealers.

On our arrival at Hurdwah, the banks of the Ganges presented a wonderful sight. Thousands of pilgrims were encamped in little white tents on either bank of the Ganges, which flowed in its downward course to the sea just outside the town. Crowds of really beautiful women stood up to the waist in its crystal waters, with

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their saturated drapery clinging tightly to their bodies, displaying figures of the most exquisite symmetry. Beyond the crowds on the banks large droves of horses and cattle were kept in groups by the long whips and shouts of their owners. Few sights in India are better calculated to repay the sight-seer than the Hurdwah fair; but I was compelled to leave it the same night, as there was no accommodation for a traveller. The Viceroy was shooting in the neighbourhood, and every available nook and corner was taken up for those belonging to the Viceregal party.

Next day we reached Umballah, and here I at last met with what I wanted, when, by the obliging assistance of Capt. Jackson, of the Native Cavalry, to whom I had a letter of introduction, I was soon enabled to procure eight splendid mules.

After three days' delay in making the necessary arrangements for the transport of my animals, we set off on our return to Calcutta.

The boys Lowtzang and Masu proved but sorry syces, being afraid of the mules, whose temper was not proof against the discomforts of railway travelling. I had, therefore, to don a rough suit, and act as my own muleteer—anything but a pleasant task. The thirst of the mules seemed inextinguishable; whenever we stopped long enough for the purpose, I got into their truck, and when the pail of water was handed up one, two, or three noses would be shoved into it, often to the loss of the water, which would be upset in the struggle.

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At Allahabad, the mules, having been shunted on to a side line, I set off in quest of grass and grain; and after making the necessary purchases, without changing my stable suit, and attended closely by a favourite bull-dog, went to an hotel for a bath and dinner, bidding Philip follow with my portmanteau.

The landlord of the hotel, evidently a sporting gent, was greatly struck by the look of my bull-dog, and, after condescendingly informing me that I could not have a room, brusquely asked if the dog was for sale.

Feeling rather amused at the manner of mine host, and suddenly remembering that my appearance might have something to do with it, I touched my cap, and observed that I had not thought of selling the dog, but if I could get my price for him, why, I would not mind. 'Well,' said mine host, 'what do you want for him?' I replied, not without a fear that he might take me at my word, that I wanted five hundred rupees for Billy. 'Pooh! pooh!' said the landlord; 'I'll tell you what I'll give you—two gold mohurs and a drink for him; now what do you say?' However, I stuck to my price, which greatly irritated this would-be owner of the bull-dog.

Philip now arrived with a cooly bearing my portmanteau. A few words in Chinese put him on his guard, and I proceeded to inquire if there was not another hotel where a theatrical *troupe* were staying.

Mine host, on this, jumped to the conclusion that I must belong to this *troupe*, and asked if such was not the case. Unable to resist the inclination of amusing

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myself at the expense of so much inquisitiveness, I replied in the affirmative. He then asked me what parts I took on the stage, so I replied, 'Comic tragedy.' 'Ah, well,' replied he, in a highly condescending manner, 'I shall have a look at you to-night.'

Glad now to escape, I asked for a gharry, which, on payment in advance, was produced by the amiable host, who, as a parting salutation, informed me that he would have another talk with me about the 'dawg.'

At the other hotel I was more fortunate in securing quarters, and after dinner I strolled into the theatre in happy forgetfulness of my joke of the afternoon.

I had scarcely taken a seat, however, when mine host walked in with a friend, and took his place a few seats off. He soon espied me, and we exchanged a nod of recognition.

In the course of the play I applauded a scene loudly, when mine host, addressing his neighbour, observed, 'There, you see, that's the way these theatrical people do; that fellow there belongs to the *troupe*, and leads the applause," a proceeding which appeared to tickle him amazingly.

After the first act was over, he passed me on his way out, and observed that he wanted to speak to me about my dog.

This was becoming rather unpleasant; so, availing myself of my acquaintance with the manager of the theatre, whom I had met in China, I escaped behind the scenes, thus administering the finishing stroke to mine host, who had no further opportunity of dealing, as I left Allahabad by the midnight train, leaving Philip to follow next day with the mules.

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Little now remained for me to do in the way of preparation. Through the courtesy of Mr. Ashley Eden, I was provided with a letter of introduction to the Commissioner of Assam, and a letter to Mr. Sandeman, the Accountant-General, through whose kindness I arranged, in the absence of any banks in Assam, to draw my funds through the Government treasury—a very great convenience—for which I am deeply indebted to that gentleman.

As soon as Philip arrived, I sent him with the two boys, the mules, and dogs on board the steamer 'Punjaub,' Captain Elder, in which Mr. Sutherland, agent of the company, had kindly offered a passage for myself and party to Debrughur, in Northern Assam.

I saw my party safely off, promising to join them on the following Monday at Kooshteah, on the Ganges, the voyage from Calcutta, round by the Soonderbunds, to Kooshteah, occupying just a week; while the same journey by rail can be accomplished in one night.

This, my last week in Calcutta, I spent chiefly in letter-writing, and taking leave of numerous well-wishers; and, at last, on the 9th of May, I bade good-bye to my kind host, Mr. Skinner, and a party of gentlemen assembled at his house in honour of my departure, and started to join my party.

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CHAPTER IV.

KOOSHTEAH TO GOWHATTY.

The Bramapootra—Serajgunge—Change of River-bed—The Rajmahal—Proposed Companion—Partnership of Explorers—Crocodiles—Water Snakes—Gwalpara—Gowhatty—Wants of a Station.

ON arriving at Kooshteah next morning, no steamer was visible, but in the course of the afternoon she arrived with her two flats in tow, one on each side, and I hurried on board anxious to hear that all was well. The Chinamen were in capital spirits, and the mules quite at home in their temporary stalls on deck, but my favourite dog Mahmoud had died the day before, from an attack of pneumonia; this was a great loss, for he was a splendid watch-dog, and would have been most valuable in the wild country of Thibet.

We were detained three days at Kooshteah waiting for cargo. The steamer lay under the banks of the river sheltered from the breeze, and the heat was fearful; during the day the thermometer stood at 104° in the shade, and registered 96° at night, so that on the fourth day all were glad to quit our moorings and get out into the broad waters of the Ganges, and thence into the Bramapootra at Goolunda.

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Once upon this mighty stream, life again became bearable. The waters fed by the snows of Thibet, cooled the breeze which blows steadily down-stream at this time of the year, and, as we faced it, the effect on our exhausted frames was almost magical. We stretched ourselves like men who had just risen from a long and heavy sleep; my bulldogs which for the previous few days had been lying listlessly about the decks, alike indifferent to food and caresses, sniffed the cool air, and, with a shake, seemed to throw off the lethargy which had for so long robbed life of pleasure. The mules, which had stood patiently, during long hot days, with hanging heads, greeted the refreshing breeze with whinnyings and playful attempts to lay hold of the Calassees as they passed to and fro along the deck.

Among the passengers on board the change was equally appreciated. The hearty laugh was soon heard along the decks, with the pop of the 'belatee panee,'* used in the manufacture of 'pegs,' a very appropriate name given to potations which, in the days of my Indian griffinage, some fifteen years ago, were called by the less significant name of 'brandy and sodas.' Each pop was followed by a long-drawn 'ah,' which consigned to oblivion the remembrance of past woes. Thus commenced our voyage up the Bramapootra.

On the evening of the second day from Kooshteah we arrived at Serajgunge. There was nothing to be seen in the shape of a town: the only representative of civilization visible from the steamer was a large hemp factory

* Soda-water.

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more than a mile inland, which was pointed out as having, a year or two before, stood close to the river bank. This indeed was evidence of the rapidity with which the river changes its course, a characteristic, peculiar to it, which affords one of the greatest obstacles that navigators have to contend against in the Bramapootra.

To give some idea of the uncertainty of this river's course, Mr. Sandeman, the Accountant-General in Calcutta, gave me a copy of a map showing a survey of the Bramapootra made less than one hundred years ago, which marks the old course of the river below Gowhatty, more than fifty miles to the eastward of its present channel.

These rapid changes are undoubtedly attributable to the deposits brought down by the annual floods, which in one season form huge sand-banks, and when left dry in the winter months speedily become covered with rank vegetation, forming, on the next rise of the river, great barriers against the stream, which force its waters into new channels.

The day after leaving Serajgunge, we anchored in the evening alongside the steamer 'Rajmahal,' bound from Northern Assam to Calcutta.

After we had safely moored, some of the passengers from the other steamer came on board to hear and exchange news, and among them was a gentleman who made anxious enquiries for myself. Such a message brought me quickly on deck, hearing that I was enquired for, greatly wondering what any person coming from

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Assam could want with me. I was not long kept in suspense, for a stranger eagerly greeted me, expressing his delight at the meeting, to ensure which he had come down-river from Debrughur. He then went on to explain that he was anxious to accompany me in the journey to Thibet, having made all his preparations in anticipation of this event, observing also that, as he understood surveying, he could lay down the route as we went along. Here was a dilemma, a gentleman had positively journeyed over eight hundred miles to join me in the expedition, only now to be told that I could not consent to it. It was an ungracious duty to perform, but the very idea of having a person in my party bent on carrying a lot of instruments with him, and using them among the suspicious tribes we would encounter nerved me to reply that I regretted that all my arrangements had been made, and it would be impossible for him to join my party, but that if he was bent on the same journey as myself, I hoped we might have the pleasure of meeting on the road and comparing notes. This was a great blow to my would-be companion, and I heard afterwards that he complained of want of courtesy on my part in thus refusing his company. Lest some of my readers, who are inexperienced in the physical hardships and mental trials to be encountered in such a journey, should be inclined to think that there was a churlishness in thus refusing to allow this gentleman to join me, I must crave their patience while I briefly state my reasons for doing so.

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Since boyhood I have read with avidity all books of travel within my reach, and long before I was in a position to undertake a pioneering journey the perusal of such works confirmed me in the opinion that the most successful explorers of modern times have been those who travelled alone. In Africa I had the example of that father of explorers, Livingstone, besides those of Baker, Burton, Reade, and others, men whose success as skilful and brave explorers is undeniable, all of whom travelled alone, sharing with no one the merit of success or the blame of defeat. In South America, Musters, depending entirely on himself, travelled through Patagonia successfully; while Shaw, quite alone, reached Kashgar, and returned to India, making one of the most successful journeys in that part of Asia of his day. Colonel Hannay, also alone, travelled from the Irrawaddy to the Bramapootra, a journey which is now considered almost impossible, on account of the lawlessness of the people inhabiting the intervening country.

Such are a few of the most successful journeys which have been accomplished by single individuals. It would be an ungracious task to particularise those expeditions in which what may be termed a partnership of explorers has resulted in defeat, quarrels, and lasting enmity, brought about by jealousy, and the close intercourse of incompatible natures.

These are the considerations that have always induced me to travel alone, and led to my declining a companion on this occasion. True, I have been unsuccessful more than once, but I alone bear the misfortune of defeat,

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envying none greater success than myself. Nor when I look back on the years I have spent alone, leading a wild life, is their remembrance mixed with a regret that the excitement and pleasure of that free and unfettered existence were ever marred by a thought of unkindness towards a close companion.

I can conceive nothing more uncomfortable than to be associated in an exploring expedition with two or three other individuals, one perhaps a surveyor, another a botanist, geologist, or artist; another perhaps cares for nothing but getting successfully through the journey; while a fourth possibly is bent on procuring commercial statistics; such a party is morally certain to come to grief in a strange and unknown country. The moment any real difficulty occurs, the man anxious to get through his journey naturally wishes to take the shortest route; the trader will advocate the most populous road; the surveyor, having caught a glimpse of a very high mountain on the right or left, urges a short detour to enable him to ascertain its height; the naturalist, having been told by a native of the country of some rare bird or bug haunting a certain far-off neighbourhood, suggests a halt while he goes in chase; the geologist, eager to follow up some theory, perhaps lags behind, a constant source of anxiety to his companions.

This state of things may be very well if everything goes on smoothly, and there be no lack of provisions, means of carriage, and no hostile tribes about; but when these little difficulties arise, all hobbies succumb to pressing necessity, and a number of men with different

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tastes and ideas are suddenly thrown upon each other for society day after day and week after week. Then comes the conflict. There may be one nominally in command, but actual discipline is out of the question. Each individual sees things by the light of his own candle; opinions differ, discussions follow, and everyone being unconsciously sick of constantly listening to his neighbour, becomes irritable. Little unpleasantnesses grow into positive antagonism, and finally result in a separation of the party, or its premature return to the point of departure.

This picture, though it is not drawn altogether from personal experience, nevertheless portrays what I always expect to hear of as the result of such an expedition.

It is doubtless advisable for such a party to finish the exploration of a route that has previously been travelled by some solitary explorer, but then only in case of his reporting favourably of the people through whose country he has travelled, and of the means of transport and facility of obtaining supplies. Under such circumstances a large party might be expected to succeed, but not otherwise, unless in very rare instances.

A single individual, untrammelled by numerous followers, much baggage, and the opinions of others, will succeed in getting through difficulties that would prove fatal to the progress of a large party; his utter helplessness and dependence on the honour of savages stand him in good stead. He is compelled to throw himself on their protection, and treat them with a consideration which a large party would hesitate to display; so that

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the pride and independence of the people would be roused against them.

It must be remembered also that a large party cannot be entertained by chiefs and others either so long or with the same freedom as a solitary individual, and that the little baggage and articles of value that a shrewd explorer will carry with him are not so likely to appeal to the covetousness inherent in every savage.

My excuse for this digression on a subject of little interest to any save an explorer, must be a desire to warn intending travellers against the fatal mistake of supposing that numbers, in all cases, denote strength.

Leaving the steamer 'Rajmahal' next morning, at daylight, we continued up river. The scenery on either bank was most uninteresting, the view being shut in by a line of trees growing down to the water's edge, the forest occasionally giving place to extensive plains of tall reed-like grass.

The river was now beginning to rise, masses of drift floated down stream, while in many places the sandy banks were beginning to cave in, and large landslips accompanied by loud reports as they fell into the water, were constantly taking place.

The increased current, consequent on the rise of the river from the summer rains, which had now fairly set in, greatly retarded our progress and increased the difficulties of navigation. Ugly sandbanks, some just covered and others partially so, compelled us occasionally to cross the river in search of the channel, and in this performance we would often lose several miles already made.

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The captain's duties never ceased from the time that the anchor left the ground in the morning until we brought up again at night, after accomplishing some twenty miles ; while the leadsmen kept up their monotonous chant all day.

After a day or two the first rise of water subsided a little, partly uncovering numerous sandbanks, which formed the basking places of innumerable crocodiles ('lacerta gangetica'), the shooting of which afforded some occasional sport.

This kind of crocodile, with its slender elongated snout and unequal jagged-looking teeth, though presenting if possible a more repulsive spectacle than the other kind (lacerta crocodilus), with its flat head and cruel-looking jaws, is comparatively harmless, and differs from the latter very much in its habits.

The lacerta crocodilus, or alligator as some people call it to distinguish it from the other, loves to haunt inland morasses or sluggish creeks with slimy mud banks ; he is not fond of the deep swift running waters of large rivers, although he is occasionally met with there, but I believe only when pressed by hunger to go in search of food.

With regard to the crocodile, I have never met him in inland pools or up creeks any great distance from the river ; he is a fisherman, and loves the broad waters with a deep swift current, and is more cleanly than the alligator, delighting to bask in the sunshine on the edge of dry sandbanks in the middle of the river.

While on the subject of crocodiles, I cannot refrain

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from exposing what I believe to be a common popular fallacy regarding them. So much has been said about the bullet-proof armour of this reptile, that many people suppose it is very difficult to kill it; such however is not the case, a bullet striking one either before or behind the shoulder is generally fatal, and they bleed to death very quickly; not, however, before, in many cases, wriggling fishlike into the water, where they sink to the bottom and die. The propensity of a mortally wounded alligator to roll down the steep edge of a sandbank or the sloping sides of a creek and disappear under water, is apt to make one believe that bullets have little effect on him; but I have shot scores of them, and have invariably found that those which slid into the water after being well hit, were dead not far off, while others which were shot on the flat some distance from the edge of the sandbanks would, on being struck, flounder about for a time, furiously snapping their jaws, while a perfect fountain of blackish blood spouted from the wound, causing death in a very few minutes.

Crocodiles are not the only ugly reptile to be found in the Bramapootra. Large water-snakes, both venomous and harmless, are numerous.

It often happened that these large snakes coiled themselves round the rudder chains. On one occasion the chains became jammed in some way, and it was necessary to send a man down to clear them. A large snake, however, was coiled round them, which none of the crew would venture to disturb, so that the captain was obliged to shoot it.

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Often in the mornings the drift-wood congregated round the paddle-wheels of the steamer would afford a resting place for several snakes, beautiful in the brilliant variety of their coloured skins. The presence of these reptiles was always unpleasant, and they invariably fell victims to the dislike of some one on board.

On the eighth day from Kooshteah we arrived at the little station of Gwalpara, built on the summit of a hill, rising abruptly from the left bank of the river. The station consisted of about two or three houses, occupied by the deputy-commissioner, doctor, and police officers.

On the second day from Gwalpara we entered a long reach in the river, from which, as the heavy rain clouds lifted, we occasionally caught a glimpse of the dark outlines of well-wooded hills bounding the horizon on either hand.

On the right bank a long bund skirted the river, forming in these days a substantial monument of the industry of the Assamese people, of whom a remnant now only remains.

This neighbourhood affords still another monument of their industrious and settled habits but a century or two since. Behind a large hill, twenty miles inland from the right bank of the river, there stand in the centre of a large Bheel or lake, surrounded for miles in every direction by dense tree jungle, the ruined arches of a bridge, which formerly spanned the Bramapootra.

A turn in the river, which now flowed between low-wooded hills, afforded us a pleasant change of scene. In place of interminable grassy plains our eyes were

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delighted by the gentle slopes of the hills, decked with groves of trees showing the luxuriant foliage and rich shades of tropical vegetation, while in the distant perspective on the left bank lay the picturesque station of Gowhatty, the seat of government in Assam. The little white bungalows of the Commissioner and his staff, with those of one or two tea-planters, peeping from amidst the rich tropical foliage, together with numerous patches of cultivation surrounding the huts of the Assamese peasantry, on the hill sides, formed a pretty picture, and reminded us that we were once more nearing the haunts of men, and this pleasure was increased when we at last let go our anchor opposite the station.

Scarcely had we brought up, when officials and planters hurried on board to avail themselves of the fortnigtly opportunity to 'kill time' on board 'the steamer.' These poor banished ones, far away from the delights of Calcutta shops, were all very soon engaged in anxious enquiry for soda and tonic water, Bass and brandy, cases of which form a considerable portion of the upward cargo. Groceries and preserved meats were eagerly enquired for to vary the everlasting fowl; for mutton they have not, and beef is difficult to be got, for the Assamese dislike selling their cattle—of which they possess numerous herds—for slaughter.

The larders and store-rooms of our visitors having been replenished, diligent enquiries were next made of our patient and courteous captain for a thousand and one articles, such as hats, boots, saddles, whips, gloves, babies' socks, ladies' bonnets, a few cheeses, a chest of

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drawers, or even a cradle, for all of which he had received a commission since his last trip, and which he had brought up simply out of kindness to the unfortunate men whose fate it is to live in Assam. This furious demand for food and clothing is apt to leave a bad impression on the mind of a new comer, but he needs only one day spent on shore at the house of any of the hospitable residents to have his first bad impressions thoroughly effaced by the abundant good cheer which reigns around him.

During the evening I received an invitation from Colonel Bivar—an old resident—to spend a day or two with him, and as our steamer would be detained for cargo and some repairs, the opportunity thus afforded to take a run on shore was eagerly embraced.

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CHAPTER V.

GOWHATTY TO DEBRUGHUR.

Umanander—Tezpoore—Annual Fair—A Sudden Flood—A Dangerou Night—Wild Buffaloes—Dikhoo Mookh—Mosquitoes and Mules—Debrughur.

A SHORT halt at Gowhatty was made most pleasant by the kindness of the residents, who manifested great interest in my success, and I embarked again to continue the voyage up the Bramapootra with the most lively remembrances of the hospitality which had been so freely extended to one who was in every sense a stranger.

Steaming past the station we steered for the main channel of the river, running close to the opposite bank. The channel here is very deep and narrow, and we passed under the rocky island of Umanander, rising like a pinnacle from the river, and covered with magnificent trees, from the midst of which peeped the picturesque domes of numerous Hindoo temples.

A few miles beyond this island the pretty green hills recede from the river, which again opens out into a broad stream, running through dreary plains of grass jungle, or forests growing to the water's edge.

At the end of three days from Gowhatty we arrived

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at the station of Tezpoore, picturesquely situated on a range of low hills.

The annual fair of Tezpoore attracts a few Bhooteahs and Thibetans, who bring down ponies, musk, and yak tails, which they barter for rice and English piece goods.

The fact of these people visiting this fair has given rise to the idea that Tezpoore will eventually become of great importance as a trading station, from which Assam will supply Bhootan and Central Thibet with tea. It is, however, more probable that the trade which will at some future day spring up here will never assume very great proportions. The scanty population of Bhootan, even if they took all their brick tea and piece goods from Assam could do little towards supporting a great trade, while Central Thibet will more easily draw her supplies of tea by direct routes from Northern India instead of receiving them by the longer and more difficult journey through Bhootan.

Some have wondered why the Bhooteahs and Thibetan traders never purchase tea at Tezpoore, and it does seem strange that an article so greatly in demand in their country should never be enquired after; but this apparent indifference is easily accounted for. The retail business in tea, as already stated, is entirely in the hands of the Lamas of Thibet, whose influence is paramount also in Bhootan, and all traders are forbidden, under penalty of death, to deal in this article. Until this monopoly ceases to exist, and we have established a right to trade in Thibet, neither that country or Bhootan will take our Assam tea.

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After a few hours' delay we continued on, leaving behind the picturesque neighbourhood of Tezpoore.

Every day now brought an increased rise in the river, and the current became very strong. Three days' journey from Tezpoore we anchored one evening in comparatively slack water, under the right bank of the river, with every sign of an increasing flood. In the main channel large masses of drift were borne rapidly down stream. Giant trees, with the green leaves still on their branches, dotted the river everywhere, like green islands, while their huge black trunks, twisting and turning in the eddies of the stream, looked like marine monsters disporting themselves. I could scarcely refrain from a shudder at the possibility of one of these logs coming in contact with the vessel, which in the event of a collision, would be inevitably pierced and founder.

The captain's anxious face, as he stood at the bow watching these signs of coming flood convinced me that my fears were not without foundation, and on questioning him he told me that we were now about to encounter one of those sudden risings to which the Bramapootra is subject every summer. At present we were safe enough, but he feared that before the night was over we should find ourselves opposed to the full force of the current which, while he was speaking, seemed to gather volume and strength.

Before turning in for the night, about ten o'clock, the water had risen several feet, and the river bank was being washed away rapidly, as was announced by the oft-recurring reports of the landslips falling into

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the water. As yet, however, the two anchors held bravely.

For some time I was kept awake by the roar of the surrounding waters and the loud concussions of the falling banks, while the grating sound of floating logs as they ground along the vessel's keel, kept alive all sorts of apprehensions. In spite of such unpleasant sounds I gradually dozed off to sleep for an hour or more, at the end of which time I was awakened by a loud noise on deck and the stamping of feet.

Leaving my cabin, which was on the deck of one of the flats, I crossed over to the steamer, where the captain with his crew were all on the alert. The river had risen many feet, and the force of the current setting towards the nearest bank, rushed past our vessel at a terrific rate, carrying all before it. Trees and floating islands of drift were hurried along, and, meeting in their course the steamer's bows, formed huge masses across the two cables by which her head was moored.

The weight of this mass of drift was enormous, and prevented the vessels rising to the rush of water which occasionally boiled up over the bows. The night was pitch dark, thus rendering our position still more helpless. We could not seek a safer anchorage for fear of drifting on a sandbank in the dark, so there was nothing for it but to hold on as long as possible, and in this position we remained till three o'clock in the morning, with the waters rising and current increasing.

So far, our four anchors had held pretty well, but the sandy bed of the river began to feel the effects of the

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mighty flood which stirred it up, and the anchors began to drag. In vain we paid out chain. The very bed of the river seemed moving, and we drove helplessly before the flood for more than two miles.

I shall not readily forget the sensation felt on discovering that we were being swept away down this treacherous river; at any moment we might strike some bank, turned by the rising flood into a quicksand, and sink out of sight. Truly, the position was uncomfortable. We were not yet, however, doomed to destruction. At a lucky turn in the river, an eddy caught the vessels, and carried them into slack water, where, our anchors again taking hold, we lay till daylight, and then weighed, and got into a nullah out of the main stream, where we anchored again, and waited until the great rise of the waters had a little subsided.

We were detained all day in the nullah, our view confined by two walls of tall reeds, which grew on either bank, so that we were glad to while away the weary hours by a little practice at the numerous wild fowl, which from time to time flew over the vessel.

Towards night there was a sensible fall in the waters, and next morning we left our retreat, and, crossing the main stream of the river, made our way slowly along under the left bank, taking advantage of the slack water in the numerous channels formed by sandbanks and inland nullahs now filled with water.

While threading our way among the reedy islands, formed by the waters entering these nullahs, our rifles were often brought to bear upon the large herds of

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wild buffaloes making their way from the islands to the main bank of the river.

Early one morning the captain sent his servant with word that a large herd of buffaloes were grazing on the bank of the river some distance above us, and, as the steamer was making very slow way against the current, we might get a shot. This was welcome news; the chance of varying the monotony of the voyage by a little rifle practice was too tempting to be resisted, so I speedily joined the captain, whose battery was all ready. We soon came upon the herd, guarded by a fine old bull, with a pair of gigantic horns, grazing quietly on the bank, apparently quite indifferent to the approach of the steamer, for they looked at it with a little curiosity for a moment or so, and then kept on feeding, confident in the vigilance of the old bull, who, standing apart from the herd, watched our approach.

Continuing along close to the bank, we at last came abreast of them, within two hundred yards of the bull; the captain then fired, planting a ball in his ribs. When struck, the old patriarch faced round, and bade us defiance by an angry shake of the head, stamping his forefoot savagely. This was a signal for his sultanas, with their offspring, to make for a thick grass jungle close at hand, while the bull walked majestically after them, seemingly too disdainful to run from danger in the presence of those under his charge.

As we steamed on, we again came abreast of him, when he again halted to examine the strange object, presenting so fair a shot that the captain, who was a

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splendid marksman, planted another ball in his side. This seemed to sicken him, and he staggered off after the herd, stopping again, however, on the very edge of the open to defy us with an angry shake of his head before he finally sought shelter in the jungle, and disappeared.

He was a magnificent animal, standing nearly sixteen hands, with a fine pair of horns, each measuring fully five feet from buff to tip. It seemed a pity to destroy him, but wild buffaloes are so numerous in Assam, and so destructive, as to be an absolute pest to the cultivators and owners of tame herds.

It often happens that a wild bull, driven from his own herd for some misdemeanour, or by a successful rival, takes up with a tame herd in the neighbourhood, in which case he kills every tame bull in the herd, often inflicting a serious loss upon the owner. Nor do his savage propensities stop here. The herdsmen, when they visit their herds, are often unsuspicious of his presence until too late to escape him, and numbers of natives thus meet their death. When rendered desperate by banishment from his wild companions, the buffalo will attack anything. A tiger stands but little chance in a fair fight with one of these outlawed monarchs of the jungle. The buffalo is sure to come off conqueror, either killing the tiger, or forcing him to seek safety in flight. Few wild animals in Assam afford better sport to the shikary, mounted on an elephant, than one of these solitary bulls, if he be overtaken in the open. An instance of this occurs to me in an adventure narrated by an old resident in Northern Assam.

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One hot, sultry morning, during the rainy season, he mounted his pad elephant, which he had trained to shikar, and sallied forth from his tea plantation, situated on the Dehing river, near to Debrughur; and, after a short journey through the dense jungle surrounding his place, came out on a large open, covered with wild paddy.* In the centre of this clearing he espied several buffaloes, which, from their evident indifference to his approach, he mistook in the distance for tame ones. Before he had proceeded far, however, he discovered that they were jungle wallahs,† in charge of a fine old bull.

True to a hunter's instincts, the shikary singled out the old bull, and, getting within easy distance of him, fired. The buffalo received this ball without flinching, and came down upon him with a grand charge. A second ball stopped him within a yard or two of the elephant; only for a minute or two, however, for, recovering himself, he charged again and again—nine times—receiving a ball each time, till at last he dropped from loss of blood, but not before inflicting a terrible wound on the elephant.

As a rule, a wounded buffalo will make for cover, if near at hand; but if hit hard in the open, he becomes a most determined assailant.

Only forty miles remained to complete our voyage to Debrughur when we anchored for the night at the mouth of the Dikhoo river.

* Rice.

† Hindoostanee term applied to wild animals to distinguish them from tame ones.

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A few miles above the mouth of this river, on the left bank, lie the ruins of an old Assamese fort, opposite to the station of Seep Saugor, which has sprung up amidst the ruins of what was formerly a large Assamese town.

Several large tanks, in a state of fair preservation, with two fine old Hindoo temples still remain to testify to the energy and civilization formerly characteristic of the Assamese, which form a striking contrast to the lethargic existence of the present scanty population.

The contemplation of these ruins, surrounded by an almost impracticable jungle, which has over-grown the once fertile and well-cultivated fields of a people that have almost passed away, is calculated to strike one with an intense desire to learn more of the history of those terrible events, which have robbed a fertile country of a large and industrious population, and converted it into a wilderness of swampy forest, breeding deadly miasma, and teeming with wild beasts and reptiles.

The mouth of the Dikhoo river has obtained an unenviable notoriety from the swarms of insatiable mosquitoes which attack man and beast most viciously.

I have suffered from the attack of mosquitoes in several countries, especially on the banks of the Irrawaddy in Burmah ; but the Dikhoo mosquito is the most venomous that I ever encountered.

Their envenomed attacks soon drove all from the usual evening lounge on deck, to seek refuge in bed under the mosquito curtains ; but in less than an hour every one was on deck again in a state of absolute torment, and sleep was out of the question.

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The men were not the only unfortunates. My poor mules on first feeling themselves attacked, kept up a perpetual movement of the hoofs, performing a sort of diabolical tattoo on the decks ; but this mild resentment soon quickened into a much more active demonstration on their part.

Each animal being merely separated from his neighbour by a single bamboo pole, lashed from an upright between the upper and lower deck, and secured to the bulwarks, there was nothing to prevent them kicking or biting each other, so that when the stings of the mosquitoes had fairly driven them frantic, each began to resent the attack by attacking his neighbour. No sooner had we quieted one pair of combatants, then another frantic animal severely stung, would lay hold of his neighbour with a loud squeal, and in the ensuing struggle their neighbours would come in for a kick, and so the whole lot of them at last set to, and in the scuffle one or two of them broke loose and stampeded round the deck, biting and kicking at every one who approached. The captain hearing the noise in the middle of the night, at last came to my assistance, with some of the crew, and after a great deal of trouble, the mules were once more secured. Still, however, they were restless and struggled to free themselves, so much so that we were at last obliged to light a straw fire on the bank alongside and fan the smoke in upon the mules, by which means we kept off their little buzzing tormentors until daylight, when with the first rays of dawn the mosquitoes departed leaving myself and the poor mules to snatch an hour

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or two's rest. On turning out again about eight o'clock, my face and hands were much swollen from the effects of bites, and on going to visit the mules I found their sleek fat sides and flanks covered with lumps, the size of a nut, raised by the venomous stings of the Dikhoo mosquitoes, whose acquaintance I hope never to renew.

At Dikhoo Mookh,* one of the flats was to be left, and the necessary transhipment of a lot of cargo and the mules, from the flat to the steamer, detained us here till nearly midday. Next morning, when getting under weigh, just after daylight, the engine broke down, causing a delay of several hours, till repairs were effected. After a fresh start, while passing the mouth of the Dehing river, a dugout,† with a couple of men, shot out from the bank, and one of the crew came on board with a letter for me from Mr. Jenkins, a tea planter on the Dehing, offering me the use of his bungalow during my stay at Debrughur. This was welcome news, as relieving a secret anxiety as to quarters, house-room being, as I had been told, very precious at this station, and living in tents out of the question now that the rains had set in.

At 3.30 we arrived at the mouth of the Debru river, about six miles below the station of Debrughur, and anchored for the night. Here I was met by Captain Gregory, the Deputy-Commissioner, and drove up to the station with him, leaving my party to follow in the steamer next day. It was a relief to have completed our voyage of nine hundred miles up the Bramapootra,

* Assamese term signifying mouth of a river.

† Canoe.

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which had occupied twenty-four days. The remaining distance of sixty miles, between Debrughur and the frontier station of Sudiya would have to be performed in a native boat, but I looked forward to the change with pleasure, not perhaps without some forebodings that the setting in of the summer rains, would compel a long stay in Debrughur, before proceeding further north towards Thibet, forebodings which were soon realized.

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CHAPTER VI.

UPPER ASSAM.

Unexpected Delay—The Wet Season—Assamese Calamities—Depopulation—The Cooly Question—Mistaken Legislation—A Tea Plantation—Cultivation of Tea—Manufacture—Ruins—Button Quail—Parrots.

IT soon appeared that the quarters placed at my disposal at Debrughur, would become my residence for the next three months, during which it would be impossible to proceed beyond Sudiya. The rains had driven all the tribes back to their hills, while the swollen Brahmapootra and its numerous tributaries had rendered the roads leading from the plains to the hills utterly impassable. The only choice therefore lay between selecting Debrughur or Sudiya as a residence, and I chose the former place for my summer quarters.

This enforced delay was unexpected. My great desire when setting out from Calcutta had been to reach the highlands of the Mishmee hills before the rain set in, so as to escape that most tiresome of diseases, Assam fever, so prevalent in the plains during the summer months. The rains, however, had set in earlier than usual, and the time lost on the up-voyage, in consequence of the floods, had upset my calculations. It was impossible to repress

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the apprehensions that some of our party might be prostrated by fever, for Masu and Lowtzang had already begun to suffer from the damp heat of the climate.

There was some consolation in the thought that this enforced residence in Assam would enable me to learn something of the language, a knowledge of which would be of inestimable service in communicating with the tribe on the frontiers. It would be impossible to reach the Mishmee hills now before December, and by that time the roads in Thibet would be rendered impassable by snow, so that it would be necessary to remain with the Mishmees until the following spring, and then advance into Thibet.

Such was now the prospect before us, and I set to work to make ourselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

The native town of Debrughur consisted of a long row of brick and mat built houses along the left bank of the Debru river, nearly all occupied by native traders from Calcutta, and almost constituting a bazaar, in the rear of which a few Assamese dwellings of mud or bamboo mat walls, thatched with reeds or straw, comprise the whole of the native town.

About a half a mile further up the river on the same bank, are the barracks of a regiment of Assam Light Infantry, while a few scattered bungalows occupied by the civil and military officers, with a church, a gaol, and a large heap of ruins called the new Cutcherry or Court House, form the European part of the station.

There is nothing inviting about the place, and but

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for the proverbial hospitality of the Sahibs and their ladies, residence at Debrughur would have been most dreary.

Day after day a constant down-pour of rain made out-door excursions so impossible that I rarely left the house, save for an hour or so in an evening, when a slight break in the showers afforded a chance for a stroll along the river bank.

The never-ceasing patter, patter, and drop, drop, of the rain, has a most depressing effect even on those who are accustomed to a wet monsoon. I tried to escape from the ennui by making myself acquainted with the history and condition of the country.

Some remarks on Assam may take the place of a record of life at Debrughur in the wet season. And the reader may be assured that he is a gainer by the exchange.

Assam comprises the whole valley of the Bramapootra, extending over an area of more than thirty thousand square miles. To the north and north-east a range of high mountains, inhabited by numerous tribes of Bhooteahs, Abors, and Mishmees, divides it from the countries of Bhootan and Thibet. On the west it joins Bengal. On the south and south-east, another mountainous region, inhabited by innumerable tribes, separates it from Burmah. Thus, Assam may be literally described as a long curving valley of an average width of from sixty to seventy miles, completely walled in by mountains inhabited by tribes more or less savage.

Its ancient history, in which the legendary element is

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more than usually strong, would require a volume to do it justice, and those who may have a wish to know more of it, are recommended to read a work on Assam, published by W. Robinson in 1841.

For our present purpose, as intending to give a brief sketch of those circumstances which have so greatly influenced the social and political welfare of the country, it will suffice to begin with the reign of the Ahom King, Chukapah.

The Ahoms, or first conquerors of Assam, were a fine warlike race of people belonging to the Shan family, inhabiting the north-east of Burmah, whence they are supposed to have advanced into Assam about the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Under the energetic reign of the Ahom dynasty, the country seems to have thriven fairly, until about the end of the eighteenth century, when, after a long series of internecine struggles, Goureenath, the reigning king, applied to the East India Company for assistance against his enemies.

It was thought advisable by the Company at that time to put an end to the domestic inquietude reigning in Assam, and some troops were despatched to Gowhatty under Captain Welsh, who in a very short time restored perfect order; but this officer's efforts in this direction had scarcely been crowned with success when orders were sent to withdraw the British protection from the country. And from this time began that frightful chain of calamities which may be said to have literally depopulated the country.

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Rebellion followed on rebellion until, in 1809, the reigning Raja again petitioned the Indian Government for assistance. A fatal policy of non-interference led to a refusal, and the agent of the Raja applied to the court of Burmah. This Government, delighted at the opportunity of increasing their influence in the direction of India, despatched a small army across the Patkoi range, which was shortly followed by another army of sixty thousand men.

The supposed allies swept over the unfortunate country like a cloud of locusts eating up its very vitals. Invited as protectors, the Burmese soon became the possessors of Assam, committing the most frightful excesses, until at last they even threatened our Indian frontiers. This audacious conduct on the part of the Burmese led to war between Burmah and the East India Company, which finally resulted in the former being driven from the country, which was then formally annexed to our Indian possessions in 1827.

Unfortunately for Assam the interference of the British had come too late. Following in the footsteps of the Burmese invaders, the tribes of the surrounding hills descended into the plains, and carried those of the population who had escaped the sword of the Burman back to the hills as captives; so that, instead of a prosperous country, with a large and flourishing population, the British found it waste and all but depopulated.

Of all the countries bordering on India which have come into British possession, there is none whose history is so mournful as Assam, none wherein mistaken policy

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on the part of the Indian Government in the last century, is recorded in more painful evidences. Had we but maintained the protectorate from 1792, when Captain Welsh was first sent into the country to restore order, a whole population might have been saved, and the country would have been at this moment, instead of a dense jungle with the scanty remains of an energetic population sunk in apathy and vice, a happy and prosperous land of plenty.

In speaking of the present scanty population of the country, I do not forget that one or two districts are fairly populated, as for instance, those of Kamrup and Gwalpara, forming mere spots, however, in the great Assam jungle, and as such are not in any way to be considered as contradicting the assertion that there exists now only a remnant of its former population.

The discovery of the indigenous tea plant, by Mr. Robert Bruce in 1823, was the first impetus given to the progress of our new possession, and since then the cultivation of tea has assumed such great proportions as to justify the hope that it would become the means of reclaiming the country from the dense jungle which has so rapidly overspread it.

This hope, though it may not be entirely crushed, is far from being realised. Scarcity of labour has so far proved too much for the energy of British capital, and has caused great loss to the planters.

The Assamese population, to whom the early planters might reasonably have looked for labour, proved utterly useless. Sunk in idleness and vice, and surrounded by

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an almost virgin soil, yielding an abundant return to their lazy efforts at cultivation, they will not labour more than just sufficient to provide themselves with the necessaries of life.

This disinclination on the part of the Assamese to work for the planters caused the latter to seek labour in Bengal, whence they imported it to Assam at an enormous cost. In spite of this the cultivation of tea paid well at one time, and if the planters had been allowed to procure labour in their own way, consistent, of course, with justice to the labourer, there is no doubt that much capital which has been lost in tea cultivation would, at this moment, have been waging a progressive and successful war of extermination against the giant jungle which holds the country in possession.

Instead of allowing the law of supply and demand, with regard to labour, to work itself out in Assam as in other countries, an utterly unjust report of cruelty on the part of the planters towards their coolies was made the foundation for legislation on behalf of the labourer, which has given the death-blow to progress in that country.

While the cooly was legislated for, the planter and capitalist were forgotten. As the former was imported at a cost of ten pounds a head to the latter, under an agreement for three years' service, it is difficult to conceive that the planters could have systematically ill-treated their labourers, in spite of an increasing demand and the protection of district courts always accessible to the cooly. These courts were strong as against the

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planter, but absolutely weak as against the cooly. Such a statement appears strange, but it is nevertheless true. As an instance, one planter, whose acquaintance I made, imported a number of coolies, at an outlay of several thousand rupees, under an agreement to serve three years, and to repay cost of their passage to Assam. On arrival the coolies were displeased with the country, and dismayed at the reports of fever-laden jungles and so forth; consequently, they had not been long at the plantation before a great many of them left him and refused to work. Of course there was redress for the planter, but such redress was a punishment to him. He could take his coolies to court, have them imprisoned for a year, and import others in their place, for labour he must have, or his crop would be lost. The refractory coolies went to gaol with pleasure for a year, as at the expiration of their term of imprisonment the law released them from their agreement, and, on being liberated, they could offer themselves to the same planter, at an increased rate of wages, without being compelled to repay him the cost of their passage. Such was the working of legislation in favour of planters, and more unsatisfactory relations than those which existed between planters and labourers, during my stay in the country, it was impossible to conceive.

After I had been some little time in Debrughur, I accepted an invitation from Mr. Jenkins, to visit him at the Dehing Company's tea gardens, situated some twenty miles distant, on the banks of the Dehing river.

The prospect of a change was most welcome, so that

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it was with feelings of great pleasure that, a few mornings after receiving his invitation, Philip and I mounted a couple of elephants, sent by our host on the previous day.

The slouching gait of elephants, after a few miles, becomes simple torture to those seated on their backs, unless they are accustomed to this mode of travel, so that Philip and myself arrived at the plantation utterly exhausted from the jolting and intense heat, and heartily sick of this first ride through the Assam jungle.

The hospitality of our host, however, soon revived us, while the prospect of inspecting the plantation and learning something of the mode of manufacturing tea, formed a delightful contrast to the humdrum routine, which had rendered Debrughur almost unbearable.

On the following morning I visited the plantation in company with my host, who, speedily engaged in attending to his business, left me for awhile to walk about, thus giving me an opportunity, while I sauntered about, to enjoy the cool morning air, and watch the coolies picking the leaves for manufacture.

The plantation was very extensive, many acres of ground being planted with healthy-looking trees in uniform rows, about three or four feet apart, somewhat resembling neatly-trimmed box trees, every tree being carefully clipped, and perfectly flat on the top, which imparted a unique regularity to the plantation.

There are three kinds of tea plant grown in Assam: the Indigenous, the Chinese, and the Hybrid species. The first grows well, and is a small, bushy plant, culti-

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vated to about eighteen inches in height, with a very thick foliage of small leaves. The second is a taller and stronger-looking plant, about three feet in height, with a larger leaf, which when manufactured, yields a dark strong-flavoured brew. The third, or hybrid plant, is cultivated to a height of two feet or thereabouts; is a very hardy plant, much in favour among the planters.

The cultivation of tea requires great attention; constant hoeing is necessary to keep the plants free from weeds during the gathering season, for at that time of the year, from May to September, the constant rains saturate the earth, which acted upon by the great heat of the sun, produces vegetation in a marvellous manner. Constant and judicious clipping is also of great importance, so as to produce an abundance of young tender shoots, the leaves from which are those used in the manufacture of the best tea.

During the making season the work-people must be constantly on the alert, for a night's rain with an hour or two of sunshine in the morning, is sufficient to cause the young shoots to open out their leaves, which must be gathered at once, twenty-four hours often being sufficient to impart a crispness to the leaf which renders it useless for manufacture. Under these circumstances it is easy to conceive how much the planters have to depend upon the honesty and willingness of their labourers, who can at any time, by refusing to turn out, inflict a severe loss upon their employer, and yet one hears from time to time of strong laws being passed to

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protect the cooly from the planter, as though the latter were not entirely in the hands of the coolies.

An illustration of this which occurred during my visit may show that this assertion is not too strong. A neighbouring planter came in one morning on his way to the Court at Debrughur, whither he was bound to procure warrants for the apprehension of some absentees without leave. He incidentally remarked that all his labourers had had a fight among themselves, and accordingly refused to work that morning. It was a serious loss, as the young leaves ready to be picked that day would by the next morning have deteriorated in quality. I suggested that they deserved punishment. The planter replied that to punish them would be the same as fining himself several thousand rupees, and one day's loss was better than many. It was plain that while the coolies were attending at Court, or suffering imprisonment, they could pick no tea.

While Assam is looked upon as a land of banishment to which few Government servants like to be sent, and as long as the visits of high officials are confined to the cool and broad water highway of the Bramapootra, there is little hope that the progress of the country will be either rapid or satisfactory.

The establishment of a Chief Commissionership for Assam would be an experiment, the success of which might earn distinction for some energetic Viceroy, if the Bengal Government could only be persuaded to detach this province from its jurisdiction.

After spending some time in walking about the plan-

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tation, I was shown through the Godowns, where a number of people were busy manufacturing the leaf into tea.

A short description of the mode of manufacturing it may, perhaps, interest some of my readers.

Outside the tea-house were large mats on which fresh-gathered leaves were spread, and these leaves, as they became slightly withered and tough, were carried into a room in the tea-house, where they were carefully examined, and all large and coarse leaves taken out. After this they were handed to men called rollers, who proceeded to roll them gently, in large handfuls, on a board, until they were bruised without being broken. Under this process, which requires great skill and delicacy of manufacture, both hands being used very swiftly, with a peculiar turn of the wrist, the leaves exude a juice, and assume that peculiar twisted or rolled appearance to be noticed in the article when ready for consumption. As each handful of tea showed by the twist in the leaf that it had been sufficiently rolled, it was slightly pressed into a ball and laid aside to ferment for longer or shorter intervals, according to the strength of the tea required. This rolling and fermenting process occupies, perhaps, a couple of days, more or less, after which the balls are carefully broken up and spread on mats or iron pans, which are then placed in the sun or over slow ovens, to dry off, this drying process also requiring the greatest care lest the leaf should be over baked.

After this drying process the tea is again carefully picked and sifted; all large discoloured leaves and foreign substances are removed, generally by women or

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girls, whose deft fingers work with great rapidity. In the sifting process all dust and grit is got rid of, and the tea rendered fit for packing in the large lead-lined boxes in which it is exported to Calcutta. Here it is again manipulated, probably not to its advantage, or that of the English consumer, for whom it is repacked in the familiar tea-chests.

The above is merely a sketch of the process of tea-making, but will serve to give my readers some idea of the mode of manufacture without troubling them with any elaborate details of the art.

In the centre of the plantation there stand the ruins of an ancient temple, with a splendid avenue of nahor trees leading to them. These ruins and avenue were discovered when the plantation was cleared from dense jungle, and afford one of those many evidences of the rapid growth of jungle consequent on the decay of population, for the whole of the surrounding country is a dense swampy forest of giant trees.

For several days I visited the plantation in company with my host, and while he attended to his business of superintendent I amused myself by shooting numbers of a diminutive species of quail, known as the button quail. This little bird afforded excellent sport, rising almost from under my feet. One peculiarity of this bird puzzled me very much. After marking them down I never to my knowledge made them rise a second time; but whether they ran after alighting or squatted I could never ascertain.

In my wanderings round the plantation I was often

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struck by the immense number of parrots which inhabit the jungles of Assam.

Occasionally a cloud of these birds, of a beautiful green colour, would settle on a patch of clearing in immense numbers, and literally cover the ground, waddling about in a most awkward manner, greatly in contrast with their sharp graceful flight, as they whirled through the air with a variety of elegant evolutions.

These birds take very long flights in search of food, returning towards sun-down to their roosting-place, for which they appear to have a great affection. Their flesh is not bad eating if stewed, and parrot stew often made a pleasant change from the everlasting fish and fowl of daily consumption.

One morning, on coming in from the plantation to breakfast, we found a number of natives in a great state of excitement, who brought news of a kill a few miles from the bungalow, so we resolved to lie in wait and get a shot at the tiger if possible, and the planter seemed as well pleased as his guest to show the latter how they did shikar in Northern Assam.

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CHAPTER VII.

SHIKAR IN NORTHERN ASSAM.

A Watch for a Leopard—Disappointed—Plantation Law—Wild Elephants—The Taming Process—Buffalo Stalking—The Forest—Khoonkies—The Elephant and Mhitton.

AFTER breakfast, accompanied by the people who had brought us the news, we rode to the spot indicated by the carcass, where we found a young heifer had been killed by a leopard, as my host contended, in spite of the reiterated assurance on the part of our informants that they had seen the tiger. The heifer had been blooded in the open, and then dragged under a bush by the leopard, who evidently intended to finish his dainty repast on another occasion.

The carcass was quite warm, so with the prospect of a bag, mine host gave orders for the erection of a Machan in the nearest tree to which we could repair in the evening, just before sun-down, and wait for the appearance of the spotted thief.

It was impossible to conceive a nicer spot for the haunt of a tiger or leopard. A grassy open on the banks of the river was surrounded by dense tree jungle, fringed with a wide border of tall grass, eight or ten feet high,

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in which a beast of prey could lie in wait and spring out upon the unsuspecting cattle as they grazed in the open.

Indeed this spot was a favourite resort of tigers and leopards, for my host had killed several tigers there during the last few months.

Before proceeding to take a seat in the tree, it was necessary to have the carcass placed in such a position as would enable us to get a fair shot at the leopard from the Machan. We therefore had the heifer dragged into the open to a spot, about twenty yards from the tree. In this operation great care was taken not to touch the carcass, lest the keen nose of the leopard should detect the presence of an enemy. To aid in accomplishing this manœuvre, a rope brought for the purpose was attached to the elephant, and the end converted into a noose was dropped over the heifer's horns. By this means we dragged it to a spot about twenty yards from the tree, and then by aid of a bamboo pole the rope was removed without a human hand having touched the carcass. Having accomplished this feat, we ascended the Machan from the elephant without alighting on the ground, and having seated ourselves comfortably for the watch, the elephant was sent away to await at a distance the report of our rifles, which would be the signal for the mahout to return. We had not long to wait before a slight sound, like the cracking of dry reeds, in the grass jungle on the right, gave notice that our quarry was preparing for his supper. In less than half an hour from the time that we took up our position, the head of the leopard cautiously peeped out of the jungle whence he

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took a survey, and apparently satisfied that all was still, he stepped quietly out into the open and took another deliberate survey all round, and then with great confidence trotted off to the bush under which he had hidden his dainty supper.

It was rather amusing to watch his air of surprise when he found the place empty; for a moment or two he stood as if greatly puzzled, but he soon appeared to make up his mind to go in search of his stolen meal. Taking a cast round the bush in a wide circle, he hit upon the scent, then with head erect he soon came upon the carcass.

Up to this time we had had many opportunities for a fair shot at him, but the graceful actions of the animal had charmed me so much that I had begged my companion by a sign not to fire.

The moment he came upon the carcass he halted suddenly and laying back his ears, crouched aside ready for a spring, then creeping up to his kill, he stood over it a second as though enjoying the prospect of a supper. Just as we were going to fire, by two splendid bounds, with the quickness of a flash of lightning, he cleared the open space between himself and the grass jungle, and disappeared, without giving another chance for a shot at him.

Neither my companion nor myself could account for this sudden flight of the leopard: he could neither have seen nor scented us, for we were to leeward of him, and he had not crossed our wind.

It was most aggravating to have lost our bag in this

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way, after it had, as it were, been within our grasp ; however there was nothing for it but patience, and we determined to remain quiet in the hope of his returning to the banquet.

For more than an hour did we sit perched upon the tree like statues, straining our eyes through the evening twilight for another sight of the leopard, until night almost closed in upon our solitude.

As we sat there listening intently for any sound which might betray the coming of the leopard, strange unearthly sounds came from the forest borne on the night wind. Occasionally the hoarse cry of some of the numerous buzzards perched sentinel-like on the topmost branches of the neighbouring trees, sounded through the recesses of the forest, and in reply to their dismal notes there would come from the distance, the shrill mournful howl of a pack of jackals, as though enquiring of the feathered scavengers where the carcass was hidden over which they were keeping watch ; then when these sounds had died away, a colony of hulluk monkeys disturbed by the constant arrival of hungry buzzards alighting on their tree, would set up their shrill scornful cry of hulloö, hulloö, which sounded like the laughter of demons gathered together to watch the destruction of their feline enemy.

All other reflections soon gave place to an uncomfortable sensation of pins and needles being run into my hands and face, and the tender parts of my body, and in spite of my desire to remain quiet, I found myself compelled to rub the punctured parts, and my movements

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became so energetic at last, that I looked towards my companion to suggest a move. At that moment he caught my eye, with the same intention, for he too was suffering like myself from the ravenous attacks of mosquitoes, and seeing me resenting their attentions so energetically he laughed and asked me if I had had enough, to which I replied with a hearty affirmative, followed by a roar of laughter over our mutual discomfort.

So we had lost the leopard, but were both sportsmen enough to be aware that mishaps will occur at the best of times; we therefore fired a shot, which soon brought up the mahout with the elephant.

On proceeding to examine the carcass, we found that the mahout, when passing it, after leaving us in the tree, had dropped the rope, the sight of which had startled the leopard, and caused him to make off as he did. It was satisfactory thus to account for his strange behaviour, and we went home to dinner with good spirits and a capital appetite.

The following morning I witnessed a scene which gave rise to considerable reflection on my part on the subject of the relations which existed between my host and his plantation hands.

A dispute had occurred between the members of two families on a subject the precise nature of which I forget now, and both parties applied to the Sahib to settle the matter in dispute.

Both sides stated their case, and submitted themselves to a close cross-examination by their master, who at the close of the proceedings, expressed his opinion

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as to what he thought was right. This was received by both sides with great respect, for all the parties salaamed with reverence and took their leave perfectly satisfied.

This instance of a thorough trust in the master by the servants, spoke volumes in favour of both; and I could not but reflect, that if the law-makers of Assam were to avail themselves more of the practical knowledge of the planters, thrown as they are so much amongst the people, instead of altogether trusting to official reports, it would be to the advantage of all parties.

In writing this I would be distinctly understood as not wishing to insinuate anything disparaging towards Her Majesty's officials in Assam, for whom, as a body, I have the most profound respect as honourable gentlemen; and, in so far as circumstances will permit, believe to be most efficient public servants.

During the day two elephant-hunters in the employ of my host brought in a newly caught wild elephant. It was an interesting sight to see the captive led in between two khoonkies or tame elephants; it appeared quite crest-fallen and sullen, and apparently worn out, but when any person approached it, manifested the most violent anger, stamping its feet, and making futile efforts to reach them with its trunk. At each outbreak it was speedily reduced to submission by the tame elephants, who, on a sign from their mahouts, would squeeze it between them most unmercifully, and seize its trunk. When thus subdued its look of abject helplessness was quite pitiable to behold.

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When first captured it had been secured by a thick double rope round its neck, the ends of which were made fast to the khoonkies on each side, and in this manner it had been led between them for three days, during which time its constant efforts to escape had been punished by its companions.

The day after it was brought in it was released from its warders, and placed in a huge bail, similar to those used for bailing up cows. The bail was made very strongly; two upright posts, as thick as a man's body, were firmly sunk several feet in the ground, about twelve feet apart, and to these were attached two cross bars. The top one being double permitted the insertion of two other moveable upright bars as thick as a man's thigh, while the lower cross-bar resting on the ground, was pierced with holes about eighteen inches apart, forming sockets into which the moveable uprights fitted. The moveable uprights having been so fixed in the bottom bar as to admit the elephant's head between them, were brought together until the animal's neck was fixed in a kind of vice, and then secured to the double cross-bar by means of bolts; in this manner the huge animal was securely held in durance vile.

Twice every day it was led out for exercise and water between two khoonkies, and in less than a week a mahout rode on its neck during these excursions. In this manner it was soon tamed, every display of anger on its part being visited by a sound castigation from its tame companions, a treatment which soon wore out the wild elephant's vindictiveness, and reduced it to complete

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control, so that in less than a month it could be driven about alone by its keeper.

Elephants in Assam are a source of great profit to many who live by catching them, and several hundreds of these useful creatures are annually purchased by dealers for the Indian market. It is to be regretted that so many die during the first few months of their captivity; but they are sensitive animals, and the loss of liberty seems to break their hearts. Numbers of them, especially full grown ones, pine away, refusing food, and fretting themselves to death.

Much to the credit of the Government the law prohibits the wanton destruction of elephants in Assam, and a severe penalty is imposed on any person who shoots them, while elephant-catching can only be carried on by those who hold a licence from Government. In spite of these stringent measures, however, great numbers are annually destroyed by the hill tribes for the sake of their ivory, and it is to be feared that, unless the sale of that article is prohibited, the wild elephant of Assam will soon become a rarity.

A day or two before the termination of my visit, some villagers reported the presence of a large herd of wild buffaloes in a jheel, a few miles from the plantation, and requested that the Sahibs would attack them, as they were very troublesome among the tame herds.

The petition of the villagers opened to me a pleasing prospect of sport, while to my host, veteran shikary as he is, it conveyed little more than a request to protect his neighbours from an unpleasant enemy, too dangerous

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for them to encounter, a duty which, in his position as the Sahib of the district, he is frequently called upon to perform, and, accordingly, gave orders at once to have two khoonkies ready for us next morning.

Rising with the dawn, we equipped ourselves for the chase, and then chatted pleasantly over chota hazara (early breakfast) till the elephants, blowing the flies off themselves at the door, roused us from the fragrant Orange Pekoe and crisp toast; then, taking our rifles and a couple of bottles of cold tea, we mounted the pads, and started for the haunt of the buffaloes.

The morning had broken with thick drizzling rain, just such a morning as the hunter in Assam delights in, for then the denizens of the forest issue forth into the midans,* without fear of the broiling sun, and the myriads of hungry flies, which his fierce heat warms into active life; and then, revelling in the tender grass, the rhinoceros, buffalo, and sambur pass undisturbed hours of repose, until driven by the sun and flies, or perchance, the British shikary, into the depths of the damp dark forest.

Thus, with the weather in our favour, we rode along the bank of the Dehing river, for half a mile or so, our elephants stepping out briskly, as though eager to commence the day's sport, and then struck off into a dense forest of gomari, poma, and banyan trees. Once in the forest, our elephants showed that they were fully up to the business before them, for, changing their rolling eager gait, they stepped cautiously along, making no

* Large patches of short grass free from trees.

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sound of a footfall on the moist rich soil, while with their trunks they carefully parted the branches that impeded our passage, without cracking even a twig.

Their stealthy and noiseless progress was in keeping with the deep silence and subdued light of the forest, and, as we proceeded, I felt that indescribable something steal over me, which seems suddenly to make one realise a feeling, which I can only describe in Lamartine's words, '*Je m'ecoutais vivre*,' so deep at times was the silence around us.

The dense canopy of foliage over head was beautiful in its softened shades of green; numerous luxuriant creepers twined round the giant trunks of the trees, while from their forks the bright green blade-like leaves of various species of orchidaceous plants hung in large clusters. Conspicuous amidst the profusion of creepers was the symmetrical ratan, with its beautiful fan-like leaf, hanging in graceful festoons. We seemed to ride through a gigantic greenhouse of tropical plants, and the warm air was laden with a jasmine-like perfume.

After making our way for a mile or two through the forest, we came out on a jheel, where we hit on the trail of our game. Close by was a large nullah, from which the herd of buffaloes had just emerged; we therefore immediately started in pursuit. The track of the herd led through the jheel into the forest, on the opposite side, where one of the mahouts, an experienced elephant-catcher, took up the trail, and followed it for more than an hour with unerring certainty, the khoonkies proceeding with an air of caution that would have done

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credit to a Highland gillie on a difficult stalk. Suddenly the mahout placed the palm of his hand on the forehead of his khoonkie, which instantly, like a well-trained pointer, stood stock-still, his foot poised in the very act of stepping, and his trunk raised over the branch he was about to push aside. I confess that the wonderful sagacity of the well-trained khoonkie interested me more at that moment than the herd of buffaloes which, in the deep silence of the forest, could now be heard moving in front. Again, following our leader, we moved cautiously on; then again stopped—statue-like—to listen.

The herd was evidently a large one, exceedingly shy, and led by a wary old bull, the prints of whose hoofs showed him to be of immense size. The leading mahout, therefore, by a series of quick gestures, cautioned us to keep very quiet, and be ready with our rifles. Having given us this warning, he again moved forward, and had scarcely proceeded a hundred yards, when a snort from the old bull, evidently quite close, gave us to understand that he had scented danger; for a minute or so there was a great commotion, and sound of hoofs in front of us, as the herd drew together preparatory to making a stampede. This was our time. We pressed on for a few paces; then there was a crash through the forest, and the report of my companion's rifle, amidst the din caused by the retreating herd. The ball had missed its mark, and we remained stationary, until the noise of the furious stampede died away in the far recesses of the forest.

It was no use attempting to follow the game in their then alarmed condition. Moreover, the day was far

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advanced towards noon, and the sun having come out with great brilliancy, made elephant-riding hard work, so that, with the prospect before us of a six-mile ride back, we determined to make for the plantation.

We were somewhat disappointed with the result of our stalk, so we made a bee-line through the jungle towards home, and, defying the malaria with tobacco smoke, further soothed our feelings of disappointment by knocking over a few black pheasants which, under the skilful preparation of mine host's *chef de cuisine*, duly appeared at dinner in the evening. As we rode homewards, I could not help congratulating my companion on the possession of two such splendidly-trained elephants, and, in return, he told me of an instance of the prowess of the female khoonkie which he rode.

On one occasion, when his hunters returned from a successful elephant hunt, in which this khoonkie had been used, the mahout reported that the party, while in hot pursuit of the wild herd of elephants, had come upon a herd of mhitton, consisting of an old bull and two or three cows. The bull, indignant at being disturbed in the privacy of his harem, charged the leading khoonkie most savagely. She, however, without flinching, received the charge again and again, and at last twisted her trunk over the mhitton's neck, and got him under in the struggle that followed. She then deliberately knelt down on him, and held him pinned till the mahout cut his throat. As soon as she perceived that the bull was dead, she, unbidden, rose to her feet, and trumpeted forth her exultation at the victory.

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On our way home through the forest, we repeatedly came across the marks of what had formerly been homesteads, mounds of earth showing the spot where it had been heaped up round the mat walls of the houses to keep out the wet, while the almost obliterated beds of tiny artificial canals leading from field to field showed, by their straight course and regular occurrence, that man had once been busy in the neighbourhood. Small tanks were also to be seen near the sites of these old habitations, and groves of peach, mangoe, and jack trees marked the spots of what had once been little gardens belonging to the houses. All these signs appeared in the very heart of the forest, and mighty trees now reared their gigantic trunks all round and amidst the ruins of villages.

Here were unmistakeable evidences of a former population in a district which is now, perhaps, one of the wildest in Northern Assam; and, as we pursued our course through the silent forest, it was painful to reflect that the hand of man was no longer there to clothe the rich soil with luxuriant crops, nor the voice of man to cheer the lonely silence, which is now unbroken, save by the voice of wild animals, which are now the undisturbed denizens of these vast solitudes.

My visit, however pleasant, began to be disturbed by anxiety about the two boys, who had been left behind in Debrughur. Accordingly, the morning after our buffalo hunt, bidding adieu to my host, I found myself soon after dawn once more jolting along through the jungle, and reached Debrughur in the afternoon to find my boy Lowtzang down with fever.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSAMESE.

Fever—Bosser Fishing—The Assamese People—Habits—Houses—Dress—Religion—Morals—Opium—Difficulties of Repressing Opium Traffic—Experiences in China—Popular Mistakes—Preparations for a Start.

LOWTZANG'S fever caused me great anxiety, although he had proved so far very useless. If he should succumb to it, and be rendered unable to proceed, it would thoroughly dishearten the boy Masu, upon whose services I in some measure depended as a means of communication with the Thibetans. Even the brave little Philip might be daunted in the face of sickness, though he had often proved that the ordinary dangers of the road did not affect him. This same danger of sickness began to seem disagreeably near. I was beginning to feel a strange feeling of lassitude, a depression creeping over me, with dull, heavy pains in all my limbs, while the least exertion brought on great exhaustion. I resolved to try a change of air, by a trip on the river, thinking perhaps that these unpleasant symptoms were caused by the excessive heat. An opportunity was soon offered by a boat which was going down to the mouth of the Dehing river, and I embarked

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early one morning, about two days after my return from the tea plantation.

The cool air of the river, though very refreshing, failed to remove the distressing languor, but a liberal dose of quinine staved off, for a few hours, the attack of fever, which now appeared inevitable. Towards midday we arrived at the mouth of the Dehing, where, feeling very ill, shivering with a violent ague, I went on shore to the house of the manager of the Dehing Steam Saw-mill Company, and in less than two hours was unconscious. This unconsciousness was brought on by an overdose of quinine while the fever was on me, the consequences of which might have been serious—for I had been given by mistake nearly twenty grains—but for the relief of a copious bleeding at the nose. I, nevertheless, did not recover consciousness until the following morning, and was unable to return for Debrughur for nearly a week.

During this attack I missed the kind attentions and care of little Philip, who had remained behind to look after Lowtzang, and felt really glad when I got back to him. Though still very weak, I soon forgot my own illness, for I found Philip also down with the fever, and very ill. Poor fellow, when I arrived, he and Lowtzang were in a bad way, and had, for a day or two, been taking large doses of quinine while the fever was upon them, thus making matters worse. The Thibetan boy, Masu, fortunately was quite well, and between us we managed to change the clothes of the invalids, and get them to the hospital.

Philip was all right in a day or two, but Lowtzang

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recovered but slowly; in fact, in his case, the fever had scarcely left him before another attack came on, so that, at last, I determined to take him with me for a trip up the river in the Government steamer; a passage in which had been offered me by the courtesy of Colonel Agnew, the Commissioner.

The steamer was going to take the Commissioner to Sudiya, on his tour of inspection; but, after a day or two's steaming, the water proved too low to permit her passage, and we returned to Debrughur, after spending a night and part of a day aground on a sandbank.

The change had done Lowtzang much good, but the lad was far from well, and, indeed, for months he never so far recovered from it as to be well enough to do any work; while Philip and myself, though we had a bad attack regularly every month, were otherwise well, and amused ourselves by reading, riding the mules, and fishing in the Debru, which ran in front of our quarters, scarcely a stone's throw from the door.

We managed in these excursions to catch a few eels and bosser, a fine-shaped little fish, about the size of a large herring, and shaped somewhat like it, but with a bright silvery skin like the whiting. These little fish afford excellent sport. They ascend the rivers falling into the Bramapootra in the autumn, as soon as the water begins to fall, in immense shoals. While thus making their way from the deep waters of the great river, towards the clear inland streams, they feed very greedily, and take the fly most ravenously. In the summer months, during the floods, but few are found

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far from the Bramapootra, and these stray ones are delicate feeders, and difficult to land.

The Assamese catch them with plantain, and, following their example, I used it for bait. To a light trout rod I attached a reel of very light line, to the end of which was fastened a piece of bamboo as long as a lead pencil, and about the same thickness, and to each end of the bamboo I attached a hook, with about six inches of gut, and baited with plantain. The bait, when dropped into the water, sinks to the length of the gut, while the piece of bamboo acts as a float. The bait must then be allowed to float down the stream without being jerked, the angler taking care to keep well out of sight. In this manner I have caught great numbers. The fish take the bait with a splendid rush, and if light tackle is used, often give considerable play before showing on the bank.

Fishing, and an occasional shot at a snipe, were the only outdoor amusements to be had in the warm weather, and then the rain and sun were often in the way, so that I had plenty of spare time, when my lesson in Assamese was over, to learn something of the Assamese people.

Included in the population of the plains of Assam are numerous tribes of Miris, Domes, Abors, Khamtees, and Singphoos, many of whom have left the hills for the plains. The real Assamese are, however, easily distinguished by their dress and general appearance, and to this part of the population, as distinct from the tribes, I must confine my observations for the present, reserving

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for a future chapter a description of the tribes amongst whom I visited.

In stature the Assamese are of middle height, and the majority of them are of fair complexion, except when darkened by exposure to the sun.

They are very simple in their habits, living principally on rice, vegetables, and such small fish as they catch in the small streams and ponds in their neighbourhood. They are of gentle and pleasing manners, but exceedingly indolent, caring for little beyond the supply of their daily wants, which requires little labour on their part, and their vegetarian diet has probably much to do with their effeminate appearance.

Their houses are of the poorest description. A square hut, generally containing two rooms, one for sleeping and the other for cooking and sitting-room; the walls are made of reeds plastered with cowdung, and the roof thatched with grass or reeds. The floor is also plastered frequently with cowdung, and kept constantly swept. Their household utensils consist simply of an earthen pan for boiling rice, with one or two earthenware cups, a raised bamboo bench, which forms their bed-place, and a mat, serving as bed and bedding.

The houses of the wealthier differ but little from these, with the exception of being larger and better built. The dress of the Assamese peasant is very simple; a cotton cloth thrown over the shoulders, and another cloth wound round the waist, and reaching to the knee, forms his entire costume. The wealthier class, however, wear a large turban of fine white muslin, with a

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white scarf twisted in several folds round the upper part of the body, and a similar cloth round the loins, reaching to the ankle. Shoes are rarely if ever worn.

The dress of the women is not ungraceful; a tight-fitting jacket, reaching the waist, and buttoned up to the throat, displays the symmetry of their busts, while a silk or cotton cloth wound round the waist, and reaching to the ankle, fits somewhat tightly, and reveals the contour of their generally well-shaped limbs. Their hair is worn parted in the middle, and done up into a large chignon, secured, in the case of the wealthy, by large-headed silver pins. As ornaments they wear silver and gold earrings, with finger rings of the same metals, and anklets of silver. Taken altogether the women are not bad-looking, but after marriage they sadly disfigure themselves by dyeing the teeth black, which has a very disgusting appearance.

In religion the Assamese affect Hindooism, but they are lax in the observance of religious rites, and their ceremonies are often very different from those practised by the Hindoos of India. Traces of caste exist, but the distinctions are not so broad as in India.

Marriage among the Assamese, though considered a special duty of life, has not that sanctity which renders it very binding, for divorce is very common. A man who is tired of or displeased with his wife, has only to assemble his relations and distribute a handful of salt among them, or tear a betel leaf in two, and declare himself divorced, to get rid of his wife, and then both the man and woman are at liberty to marry again, the

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man, of course, providing for any children born before the divorce.

A widow can never marry again, but she may, without absolute disgrace, become the mistress of any man, though her position is looked upon with some contempt. The children born from this connection are considered legitimate, and inherit equally with those children born of wives. Polygamy is common, and a man marries as many wives as he can keep, while concubines seem to be looked upon as necessary to the proper appointment of the houses of the wealthy, and, as may be supposed, the domestic life of the Assamese is disturbed by female disputes.

The laxity of morals amongst the people is conspicuous, and this, coupled with the vice of an inordinate use of opium, constitutes one of the greatest drawbacks to industry and progress. Indeed, it is painful to contrast the active industry of the former population, as evidenced by the gigantic ruins to be met with in the country, with the listless apathy of their descendants, who spend most of their time under the influence of opium, caring little for anything else after they have satisfied the cravings of hunger. Men, women, and even children indulge in opium, which they prepare for use in a somewhat novel manner. Dissolving the opium in water they soak in the solution long strips of cotton cloth, about two inches wide; these, when saturated, are dried in the sun and used as occasion requires, a small piece of the cloth being torn off and chewed, or the rag soaked in water, which is then drunk as a potion. The Assamese do

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not smoke opium as the Chinese do, but my own observation led me to believe that smoking the drug is less injurious than taking it as the Assamese do. Smokers do not become insensible or fall into a trance-like state, as is commonly supposed. On the contrary, while a man smokes opium he can talk as rationally as a man who smokes a cigar, and I state this on my own personal experience, having frequently smoked opium; but the opium-drinker becomes stupified and intoxicated.

In these days, when the outcry in England is so great against the sale of opium to the Chinese, it may not be out of place, while referring to its use in Assam, to give my own experience of the effects of opium among both peoples.

There are many who blame the Indian Government for monopolising the sale of opium in Assam, and even for its introduction into the country. If we consider, however, that the Assamese and all the neighbouring tribes have cultivated opium, for their own consumption, from time immemorial, the Government must be held blameless for the act of introduction. And again the people will work for opium when they will work for nothing else, and if we consider that the Assamese were formerly able to grow the drug at a very slight cost, which enabled them to indulge in it so much more freely, we must admit that there is some wisdom in a Government taking upon itself the monopoly of an article, which, as will presently be shown, is an actual necessary of life to its subjects. By means of this monopoly, the vice of opium-drinking is rendered much more

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costly, and its price has to be earned by labour—to which the people are thus stimulated.

I have heard many clever and thoughtful people observe that the use of opium should be put down with a strong hand, but while concurring with them in the wish that the use of the drug should be extinguished, I cannot agree with them that it should be forthwith prohibited, and for this reason, that those who have been accustomed to it cannot leave it off without dying from the want of it. This is a terrible fact which does not appear to be understood by those who advocate our ceasing to send opium to China.

In China, I believe, that fully one-half or perhaps two-thirds of the population of four hundred millions, are opium-smokers, and incapable of abstaining from its use, from the fact that if they were to do so they would die of inanition, having no stimulants or medicines to supply its place. During my travels in China, I may say without exaggeration, that I have seen hundreds of cases in which people, both men and women, have died through privation of their supply of opium.

A confirmed smoker may go a day or two without his smoke, and only feel incapable of eating or performing his daily work, but within a week or ten days he would probably die for want of it. Yet while his supply is regular he is little affected by the indulgence, if not carried to excess, and is, to all intents and purposes, as well able to go about his daily work as a man who does not use it. Indeed the opium-smoker can bear a much greater amount of fatigue than the man who does not

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smoke, while, as far as I can judge, the habit does not shorten life, unless, as already stated, the consumer be deprived of his drug.

Seeing therefore that the deprivation of opium kills the consumer, how are we to stop its consumption suddenly? It simply cannot be done, save at a horrible sacrifice of life. In the case of China, were the Government capable of enforcing an order that all opium-smokers were to take out a licence under a penalty of death for neglecting to do so, and by this means procure a list of all the smokers in the empire, and then refuse to grant any more licences, the vice might die out in one generation, but it is futile to talk of such a means of stopping the consumption, for the Chinese Government are entirely incapable of enforcing a general order, even of the most trivial nature, throughout their country.

There are many men of wisdom who would to-day approve of any steps which would lead to the prohibition of an opium trade with China, and to such, believing them to be actuated by the most humane and noble motives, I would observe that to prohibit this trade would be to condemn the people of China to a harder fate than that which now all but overwhelms them. Were we to refrain from sending them opium they would cultivate it at the cost of their cereals, and bring about a scarcity of food, which would be more terrible in its effects than the present use of opium. The argument that the laws of political economy would work in this case, as in all others embracing the question of supply and demand, could not stand, for at present throughout

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the whole of eastern China, comprising half its area, it is cheaper to buy foreign opium than to grow the native drug; thus if the Chinese could not buy it they must grow it at an increased cost, and import rice at an increased cost also, thus having to pay higher for both than they do at present.

In the case of opium consumption in Assam, I earnestly hope the day may soon arrive when the Government, having gained the complete control and supervision of the people, may be able by some means to stamp out the vice; but as regards China, when will her people be under the kindly control and supervision of an upright Government? Not until her present apathetic and corrupt rulers have been replaced by men of energy and action.

To return to my narrative. I had now been more than two months and a half in Assam, it was the beginning of September, and the rains were beginning to break a little, so that I began to prepare for the journey up to Sudiya. I had ascertained beyond doubt that it was impossible to take any mules through the Mishmee country, as the roads were impassable for beasts of burden; it was therefore necessary to reship them for sale in Calcutta, and this afforded an opportunity of ascertaining the difference between wanting to buy and wanting to sell. They had cost over two thousand four hundred rupees to land in Calcutta, and their sale realized three hundred and fifty, causing a loss of more than two thousand rupees. However I had to pay for my experience, as other people do. So little was known of Northern Assam in Calcutta, that even those who had been at Debrughur, with whom

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I consulted as to the expediency of taking baggage animals, strongly urged the necessity of doing so, as the Assamese were so averse to acting as porters.

Having got rid of the mules, the next thing was to look out for an Assamese interpreter, as although I could understand the language well enough to make myself understood, his services would be needed to carry on an important conversation; and besides there is a great advantage in talking with strangers through an interpreter—it gives one time to study one's answers, as well as to evade replying distinctly to disagreeable questions. It was a long time before one could be found. The natives were terribly afraid of the northern tribes, and a salary of one hundred rupees would not tempt a single individual: at last a half-breed was found to take the post. Another attack of fever detained me for a week longer, during which my dog Billy was seized with an attack of pneumonia, a disease which, if not quickly stopped, is very fatal in Assam. The poor animals become so prostrated that they lie about incapable of any exertion, and, if neglected, become a prey to the flies. I found my poor dog literally being devoured alive by maggots, which had eaten large holes in his belly. It could scarcely be believed, unless witnessed, that the eggs of the flies in Assam will in three hours be alive and at work. During the day or two that I looked after my dog, I repeatedly found fresh sets of maggots at work, after leaving him alone for a couple of hours or so. The ravages of these insects are easily stopped by injecting mercury or carbolic acid into their holes, and by this means I rid him of them, but I

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was obliged to leave him behind in Debrughur, and he ultimately died from a relapse of pneumonia. To supply his place as watcher, I bought a couple of bull-dogs, which afterwards did good service.

I was now ready for the trip to Sudiya. Having procured two boats, one large one for my private use, and another smaller one for the heavy baggage, the only thing wanting was a crew. But this want was not so easily supplied, for the Dome tribe are a very independent lot of fellows, and, being the only people who serve as boatmen, give themselves great airs; consequently, it is necessary to engage them several days before starting, for if hurried scarcely one will respond to your call. In my case it was necessary, at last, to have resort to the authorities. After I had engaged a crew and embarked, intending if possible to get into the Bramapootra river before dark, so as to get the benefit of the cool river breeze over night, the fellows declined to budge that night, a proceeding which, seeing that they were to be paid by the day, from the time of hiring, I objected to. The objection was quietly overruled by their marching off and leaving me alone to look after my boats. It was no use to grumble, so I satisfied myself with a promise that I would be down upon them in the morning, and then turned in for the night.

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CHAPTER IX.

DEBRUGHUR TO SUDIYA.

Our Dugout—The Domes—My Blanket Tent—Skilful Navigation—The Pobah—The Camp—Pobah Stockade—The Sahib's Tree—The Dehong River—Mullet Fishing—A River Scene—Forest Echoes.

NEXT morning at daylight I turned out; there were no signs of my crew, so I called up my boys and gave orders for breakfast, and just as I was sitting down to a dish of curry and rice, the boatmen arrived, to all appearance quite happy.

Knowing how very difficult their class was to deal with, I refrained from expressing any anger at their insolent desertion the night before, and contented myself by asking if they had enjoyed themselves over night. This intended sarcasm seemed to please them greatly, and they said the Sahib was not to make a noise, and they would take me up to Sudiya all right. Very condescending! However, as I always prefer when travelling to have those about me in a good temper, I said they were naughty children and retired to my cabin, while they proceeded to get under weigh.

Our boat was one of the long canoes, hollowed out of a single log, and commonly called dugouts by the Euro-

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peans in Assam. It was about sixty feet long by four broad, with a deck forward, twelve feet in length, and on this the six men stood while paddling or poling. A space of some twenty feet amidships was housed over by water-tight mats, forming a roof, which afforded complete protection against rain and sun. Abaft the cabin a space of twelve feet was devoted to the storage of such baggage as was weather-proof, together with our cooking utensils, consisting of a frying-pan, an iron kettle, four tin pots, and as many tin plates, which served as dinner and tea service for myself and party. In the rear of the baggage was a large square box filled with sand, and this was used as a fire-place, on which we kept a wood fire constantly burning, so that if need be we could cook our meals without being obliged to land. At the stern of the dugout sat the steersman with his long paddle, which he used most skilfully as a rudder.

Altogether our dugout was very comfortable, the only objection to it being that we could not stand upright in the cabin, and had to choose between reclining or squatting, tailor fashion. Their long narrow appearance at first sight gave an unpleasant idea of crankiness, but in point of safety no kind of boat that I have ever used equals the dugout, despite its cranky appearance. Being very buoyant it is almost impossible to upset them, and, indeed, the country people load them till the gunwale is within an inch and a half of the water, and in this state they venture out into the open river amidst the whirls and eddies, which render boat navigation very difficult and even dangerous. Should they ever by any means

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capsize, they right themselves immediately and never sink.

With regard to our crew, the simple fact of their belonging to the Dome tribe, rendered them interesting. They were short sturdy fellows, with dark brown complexions, and small black moustaches ; their dress was nothing but a small piece of white cotton cloth round the loins, while their long hair was twisted up into a knot on the crown of the head.

The Domes are supposed to have migrated from India, and are now a tribe of fishermen depending almost entirely upon fish for their livelihood.

They have rented the upper waters of the Bramapootra and its tributaries from Government, and have the exclusive right of fishing. For this monopoly they are, besides paying an annual rent, compelled to furnish boatmen for the Government, for which service they are well paid. In the absence of these people I question whether it would be possible to get boatmen in Assam, for neither the Assamese nor any other tribe will act in that capacity for love or money, except for themselves.

In religion the Domes profess a high form of Hindooism, and are very particular in preserving their caste, constantly bathing themselves and washing out their cooking utensils. The real Hindoo does not admit their right to high caste, and looks upon them with more or less contempt ; but their pretensions to caste are, nevertheless, very great, and might easily mislead any one but a real Hindoo.

My crew were no exception to their tribe, for we were

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not a mile distant from Debrughur before they brought up to the river bank, and informed me that they were going to prepare their breakfast. I could not object to their feeding, so lighted my pipe and watched them. First, they cleared a space on the sandy bank about four yards square, carefully removing the surface sand lest any impurity might lurk there. Then, having lit their fires, they scoured the cooking pots, and after this washed their rice and cleaned their fish, all of which occupied nearly an hour, each man preparing his own food. While their meal was cooking they all took a bath in the river. This ceremony performed, they commenced breakfast, over which they sat chatting for nearly two hours. In this manner twice every day during our journey to Sudiya they passed fully three hours, so that our progress was slow accordingly.

On the first day from Debrughur we left the little river Meklah, which connects the Debru river with the Bramapootra during the summer rise, and entered the main stream just before sundown, when making for a sand-bank we pitched our camp for the night, happy at the prospect of the cool river breeze and a walk on the sand-bank.

As soon as the boat had been secured, by sticking one of the long paddles into the sand and tying the tow-rope to it, I landed and, together with Philip and the boys, commenced pitching my tent. This was one of my own contrivance, being made entirely of four small blankets, each about six feet long by four broad, sewn together, and bound with canvas round the edges

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and down the seams. The tent, when spread out on the ground, was twelve feet long by eight feet wide, so that when stretched over a horizontal pole, supported by two uprights, eight feet apart, it formed a slope or roof of six feet to the ground, on either side, where it was secured, by means of ropes rove through the canvas binding and fastened to pegs. The end exposed to the wind was closed with another blanket, while the other was left open. This contrivance furnished me with a snug little tent, perfectly watertight, as no amount of rain ever came through the blankets, and it could at any time be pitched by a single man in five minutes, besides being portable, and only weighing, when wet, thirty-five pounds.

We slept very comfortably all night, and awoke early in the morning greatly refreshed. The operation of preparing and eating breakfast delayed the boatmen till after ten o'clock, and then we proceeded to pole along the left bank of the river, a very slow and dangerous mode of progress. The current was very strong, and the river bank was continually falling in huge masses, which we had to dodge for fear of destruction. The skill of the Domes in steering clear of landslips and huge floating trees was admirable. Very often we would scarcely have passed a tottering mass of the bank, when it would fall into the water with a loud splash, covering our boat with spray. At such times I could not refrain from holding my breath until we had passed the danger, and for the first day or two I was in a constant state of dread lest we should be crushed by some of the land-

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slips; but the Domes knew their business, and would often wait for a mass to break away, when I could see no signs of the impending fall. At other times they would continue on, when the overhanging bank seemed tottering above, but we always had time to get clear. Along some of the reaches of the river we would get a spell of slack water, the force of the current being on the opposite shore. Then the Domes would take to their long blade-like paddles, and standing erect, three on each side of the boat, they would paddle away, keeping time to a song in which all joined, keeping stroke with perfect regularity.

After three days of poling and paddling, we arrived at the mouth of the little river Pobah, running into the main stream from the right bank. Here the Domes asked for a day's rest, and as I was in no hurry to reach Sudiya I consented, especially as we were all feeling better for the cool air of the river.

We camped on a pretty little bank near the mouth of the Pobah, and hauled the boats up. With the exception of the spot on which we encamped the banks of the little river were overhung with the branches of huge trees, so that the view was very confined, but the enclosing walls of tropical foliage were very beautiful, and I used to lie in front of the tent and watch the troops of monkeys which came morning and evening to drink and bathe.

The sensation of once more camping out in the open and the keen sense of enjoyment which this wild mode of life always begets, determined me to remain here for a few days, and do some bosser-fishing. I had been

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told in Debrughur that the Pobah was a noted stream for both mahseer and bosser, and that the latter would take a light-coloured fly. So as soon as the tent was pitched I got out my tackle, and first tried for a mahseer for supper; but failing in this, after spinning a spoon bait for nearly an hour, I gave it up as a bad job. The bosser were leaping all round and feeding greedily, so I tried them with a small yellow and green fly. After a few casts I succeeded in pricking one small fish, and for the next half-hour tried in vain. I was very anxious to get some fish to vary the daily round of fowl curry, but the prospect of landing any seemed to decrease with every cast. At last, I was about to give up in despair, when one of the Domes, who had been a silent spectator for some time, suggested that I should try the silver thing, as he termed a diminutive spoon bait which laid on the bank. With little hope, but to gratify him, I bent on the spoon and gave a cast; the bait had scarcely sunk beneath the surface when I felt a tug, and in a minute or two landed a nice fish. It was very near dark, but I managed to land four fish, and then retired to the tent, where, under the skilful hands of Philip, they speedily were cooked for supper.

Before retiring for the night several large fires were lighted round the camp, to keep off the wild animals, as the prints of their footsteps round about showed that buffaloes and tigers were in the habit of coming to drink at this part of the stream.

We spent three very pleasant days in the camp on the banks of the Pobah, and caught a great number of fish,

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but the fourth day set in so wet and stormy that I was glad to be off at an early hour.

A couple of hours poling from the mouth of the Pobah brought us to the Pobah stockade, guarded by a small detachment of the Assam Light Infantry. This stockade is intended to keep in check the Abor tribes, who are in the habit of leaving their hills in the cold weather, and descending the Dehing river on marauding trips in the surrounding plains, whence they carry off cattle and slaves.

The stockade in which the troops are quartered is an enclosure of about forty yards square, with several log houses in the centre, forming the barracks. The walls of the stockade are formed of tiers of upright logs let into the ground, and about fourteen feet high. Many of the logs since they were planted have taken root, and are now fine trees, with a profusion of branches at the top. In one corner of the enclosure a large banyan tree was pointed out to me as the 'Sahib's tree,' into which a Sahib, whose duty it once was to deliver the yearly presents to the Abors, used to climb, and from his seat in one of the branches, extending beyond the wall of the stockade, distribute the presents; this precaution of standing aloof being necessary on account of the treacherous disposition of the Abors.

It must have been a very amusing, as well as a picturesque sight, to see an Englishman dropping presents from a banyan tree to a lot of half-naked savages, scrambling for them on the ground, and the fable of the apes throwing down cocoa-nuts to the white man, struck

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me as being reversed in this case, so I could scarcely refrain from laughing when my informant told me of the novel means of safety adopted by the gallant officer.

I was very anxious to ascend the Dehong river to the point where it leaves the hills for the plains, but on giving orders accordingly to the Domes, they set up cries of horror at the bare idea of venturing into a neighbourhood famous for the bloody deeds of the Abor warriors, and flatly refused to comply.

So far I had humoured my fractious crew, as they had not thwarted me in the carrying out of any project which I had set my heart on accomplishing; but now, wishing to view the Dehong as it left the hills, I persisted on their taking me up. They had always so far done as they liked, and consequently they now set me at defiance, by shoving out into the main stream, with the intention of crossing to the opposite bank, a manœuvre which I quickly thwarted. Jumping aft and seizing the steersman by the neck, I threw him into the bottom of the boat and took his paddle, a few sweeps of which turned the boat's head in shore. Then, giving the paddle to Philip, with order to steer for the shore, I made my way forward, and applied the blade of a paddle to the shoulders of the mutineers. This had a magical effect. The fellows, instead of resenting it, laughed heartily, and the moment we touched the bank went to work with their poles, and early in the afternoon I was nearly ten miles up the Dehong.

While ascending we passed one or two Miri villages, the inhabitants of which were barely civil, and refused

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to sell us anything. The Domes were dreadfully afraid, and when I gave orders to pitch the tent on the river-bank, they besought me with tears to turn back; but wishing to be quite certain that their terror was real, I persisted for nearly an hour in remaining, but they sat in the boat with their paddles all ready in case of an attack. At last we spied two boats coming down stream, the men in which, probably with no other intention than a friendly greeting, hailed us from a long distance off. This was quite enough for my crew; they jumped up and, seizing their paddles, made a precipitate retreat down the river. I was greatly disappointed in being unable to see more of the Dehong, but I thought discretion was the better part of valour, and so allowed myself to be carried back to the Bramapootra.

The river Dehong leaves the hills about twenty miles above its junction with the Bramapootra, and is navigable during the high summer rise to this point, above which, according to some Abors whom I met at Sudiya, it is a deep, swift stream, broken by rapids.

Its appearance, so far as I ascended, was imposing; it was a quarter of a mile wide at the narrowest point, flowing with a deep, swift current. The same Abors further stated that the Dehong came from a long distance in the Lama country, and was called the 'great river' by the Lamas and people of Thibet.

As there was still an hour or two of daylight the Domes informed me that they intended to fish for mullet, a shoal of which were lying in a narrow channel between two sandbanks.

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They had come prepared with their casting nets, in the use of which they are very expert, and large seines. These they proceeded to stretch across the channel between the two sandbanks. Jumping into the water, which was about two feet deep, they soon had the net spread, supported by uprights of bamboo fixed at frequent intervals, so that the net, which was weighted down by iron sinkers, presented a barrier of over two feet above water. As soon as one end of the channel had thus been secured we pulled round one of the sandbanks and entered the other end ; two of the Domes then landed and took another net, similar to the one already planted, and dragged it after the boat, in which one man kept up a continued din by beating a piece of hollow bamboo with a stick. This frightened the mullet, which we could see on the move in hundreds down the channel, and when the boat got within a hundred yards of the fixed net, the fish, finding their passage barred, began to leap the net. As soon as the two Domes dragging the net came to within twenty yards of the standing one, they drove the bamboo stakes of their net into the sandbank on either side of the channel, and literally hemmed in the mullet.

Now all scrambled into the water and began throwing the fish into the boats. Dozens were entangled in the nets, while hundreds leaped over in a silver stream. The enclosed part of the channel seemed literally alive with fish. Having secured one hundred and eight fish, averaging a pound and a half each, I stopped further pursuit and amused myself for more than half an hour

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by watching the mullet leap the nets, which they did in grand style as soon as the water cleared a little.

A more exciting scene in fishing I have never witnessed. The great hauls taken by the Domes had been often talked of in Debrughur, but until this occasion I had scarcely believed it possible that they could catch their fish so easily. We might with the greatest ease have taken five or six hundred pounds weight of fish. As it was, even the Domes were satisfied, and we gathered up the nets after a capital supper of fresh mullet. These fish, which are from eight to twelve inches in length, are exactly like our English grey mullet, but I do not know whether they are of the same species. They seem similar, for they are found in large shoals, and run up shallow channels, where they apparently enjoy the still water. Like our own fish, they will not take bait of any kind.

We did not get under weigh next morning until a very late hour, for the Domes were intent on a great feast on fish, while I and my Chinamen also indulged ourselves. We breakfasted off mullet broiled, baked, fried, and curried, and ate only as those can who enjoy wild life. The Domes gorged to such an extent that when we did start they only poled about six miles and then begged me to camp, as they wished to have another feed of fish before they were spoiled. So, seeing that they were really unfit for work, we camped on a sand-bank, just below Sudiya, and the rest of the day was given up to feasting, for the Domes determined to finish their gorge, and by night there was scarcely enough left of the already high-flavoured fish for my Chinamen's supper.

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After I had eaten I went outside the tent to smoke and take a look round before turning in. The shades of night were gathering over us, and the river which was very broad at this point, looked smooth and still. Away on the opposite shore a fringe of tree jungle, blackened by the fast approaching darkness, marked the limit of the great waters, unbroken save by the embrochure of the Dehong, while a background of hills, sloping upwards, culminated in gigantic sombre mountains, through which the Dehong cleaves its way to the Bramapootra.

It was a lively river scene, and I lay a long time watching the flocks of cormorants as they flew swiftly along the surface of the water, towards some neighbouring tree, half sunk in the stream, on the blackened limbs of which they went to roost for the night.

There was a great stillness all around; the boatmen were dozing over their little fires, and not a sound disturbed this impressive solitude, until, startled by a sudden splash from a crocodile, as it took to the water, I saw a large buck swamp deer issuing from a reedy island just above, and about two hundred yards from the river bank. The stately creature held on its way to a small, dry sandbank, some hundred yards down stream, and, on reaching it, disturbed a pair of Brahmin ducks,* which flew away with a shrill scream, and caused the buck to pause in his march, and there he stood

* These ducks are as large as a small goose, and of a very brilliant yellow plumage. They are very common in all Indian rivers, and I have met them in Thibet, where, from their yellow plumage, they are considered sacred to the grand lama, yellow being a sacred colour.

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deliberately taking a survey all round. He could not see me, as I kept perfectly still; he began to call, listening ever and anon for replies, which came from far and near; and thus he kept on until night closed and the beautiful scene vanished from my sight.

Returning to the tent I relighted my pipe and entered into conversation with Philip, and just as we were preparing to turn in I heard the bugle call from Sudiya, which came floating to us across the water. It sounded charmingly, so much so that I took out my own cornet and played one or two airs, which resounded through the still night, and were repeated by wonderfully distinct echoes from the forest on the right bank of the river. I never recollect hearing a better echo anywhere in my life than from the forests on the banks of the Bramapootra. I often blew a military call, and then listened to the echo, which repeated it distinctly, note for note.

A few hours poling next morning landed me at Sudiya, where I succeeded in getting quarters in one of the only two European residences in the place, and after seeing all my baggage safely stowed away, paid off the Domes and once more settled down to a quiet life until the final breaking-up of the rains.

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CHAPTER X.

SUDIYA.

The Frontier Post—Break of the Rains—My Abor Visitors—Panic in the Bazaar—The Abor Tribe—Frontier Wild Tribes—The Pension System—Chinese Policy—Visit from a Tiger—Our New Interpreter—Wanted a Guide—The Khamtee Chief.

FEW frontier stations in India have witnessed within a century more stirring events than those which serve to give a history of some importance to Sudiya. Since the close of the eighteenth century, when the northern part of Assam was abandoned by Goureenath Sing, its last native ruler, Sudiya seems for many years to have been the centre round which the different frontier tribes contended for supremacy, and in their bloodthirsty wars nearly annihilated the original population.

Among the most successful tribes, the Khamtees, who immigrated from the north of Burmah, soon came to the front, and succeeded in persuading the authorities of the East India Company to confirm them in the chieftainship of the Sudiya district, subordinate to the British authority.

A series of atrocious murders, and a bold insubordination on the part of the Khamtee chief, ultimately brought about a collision between him and our troops.

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The British garrison at Sudiya was surprised, and Lieut.-Col. White, the political agent, fell a victim to the treachery which, to this day, strongly marks the Khamtee character. After this conduct the Khamtees were expelled across the frontier to a spot on the Tengapanee river, where the present chief, a son of our old antagonist, rules over his clan with a despotic hand, and raises, by the aid of numerous slaves, an abundant supply of rice for the Sudiya market.

As a place of residence, Sudiya cannot be called pleasant. Situated on the right bank of the little river Koondil, near its junction with the Bramapootra, neither church steeple nor wharves mark its whereabouts; indeed, one might easily pass up and down the river without dreaming that anything more civilized than an alligator or an indolent native existed in the neighbourhood. Nor is this impression much removed on landing.

After passing through a straggling bazaar of Assamese native huts, one enters a square plain, half a mile in extent, cleared from the jungle—looking to all appearance nothing more than a clearing—and it is not until the eye roams over the plain for awhile that it at last discovers on the far side a square brick building, at the back of a row of neat whitewashed huts. This is the magazine, and the huts are the lines of the Assam Light Infantry, which forms the frontier guard. In another building, built of wood and thatched with jungle grass, the commanding officer and his family live in solitude, for they are generally the only Europeans in

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the place. In a third dwelling, built of bamboo wicker-work, thatched with grass, and looking something like a square clothes basket, the engineer of the district puts up when he visits the station, which is probably as seldom as possible; at least, I should judge so, from the number of mice which inhabited it.

For such a history, Sudiya makes but a small show; in fact, but for the knowledge that the place is surrounded by some of the most savage and treacherous tribes on our Indian frontiers, and the romance attached to the idea that some red-handed warriors might, at any time, make an attack on the devoted heads of the garrison, Sudiya would be unbearable as a place of residence, however important as a military post for keeping in check the predatory tribes of the northern frontier.

During the first week or two it rained incessantly; then occasional breaks occurred, during which I was enabled to extend my walks beyond the clearing; and at the end of the third week the weather broke, preparatory to the last great downfall of rain before the dry season fairly set it. On the 28th September, the Bramapootra had fallen some twelve feet below its highest summer level; indeed, the previous few days of fine weather, and rapid fall of the river, induced a hope that the dry season had commenced, but on the 29th, about midday, it commenced raining heavily, and by the following morning the Bramapootra had again reached its highest summer level, having risen, in the space of eighteen hours, more than twelve feet, a clear proof that

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the great floods accompanying the summer rise of this river are due to rain, and not to the melting of snow on the Himalayas, as many suppose.

The morning of the 1st October broke clear and fine, and the dry weather set in from this time. After ten days or a fortnight the hill tribes, Degaroo Mishmees, Miris, and Abors, began to come down to the plains. The latter tribe, which I have already spoken of as inhabiting the hills to the north of Assam, bordering on Thibet, were for many years the scourge of the country in the immediate neighbourhood of the Dehing and Dehong rivers. They are a savage and warlike people, divided into innumerable clans, each clan having its head chief, who represents it in the great councils held for the purpose of settling affairs of importance concerning the general welfare. And of course the larger and more powerful the clan the greater the influence of its chief.

From their warlike disposition they command considerable respect, and are regarded with great awe by the people of the plains, from whom, before the advent of the British, they collected black mail even as far down the river as Debrughur. The Miris, a numerous tribe inhabiting the lower ranges of the hills and plains at the foot of the Abor hills, are subject to the Abors, serving as boatmen and coolies for them when they come down from their mountains.

One morning I was sitting smoking in the shade outside my quarters, when I was startled by a rush of the servants, both Chinese and Assamese, from

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the cook-house, a hundred yards distant. The fellows were considerably scared, and well they might be, for following them with hideous screams and laughter were a band of Abors, who seemed to enjoy the fright which their presence caused.

Seeing these strange visitors coming towards me, I got up and advanced to meet them, followed at a respectful distance in the rear by the frightened servants. As soon as we met every man greeted me, English fashion, by holding out a dirty paw, which I grasped without hesitation; and, pointing to my house, and at the same time throwing back my head, with an expressive turn of my hand over my mouth, invited them to come and drink. This proposition met with decided approval, expressed in diabolical shouts of laughter, and two of the dirty savages put their arms in mine, while the others followed, still laughing like fiends, and in this order of procession we marched into the porch of the house. Here the fellows squatted themselves on their hams and lighted their pipes, of which each man carried one of Chinese make, purchased during their visits to the Thibetan outposts beyond the Abor hills.

Philip, who had come up by this time, brought out Old Tom to our visitors in cups, which were emptied with great rapidity by the thirsty warriors. And as they had evidently had some arrack before their visit to me, signs of intoxication were now visible; but they remained perfectly good-tempered and seemed pleased to talk about themselves.

They were decidedly above the middle height, with

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huge limbs, rendered hideously out of proportion by unnaturally large hands and feet. Their features were also very unprepossessing. High cheek-bones, thickish lips, covering irregular and discoloured teeth, small slightly oblique eyes set under small flat foreheads, gave to their face a treacherous look extremely unpleasant to look upon, while their dark copper-coloured skins, begrimed by dirt accumulated from childhood, resembled the hides of beasts. Their dress, too, added much to their uninviting appearance. As a covering for the head some of them wore a basin-shaped hat made of wicker-work ornamented with yak tails, while others wore skins of animals such as monkeys, foxes, and bears, while one fellow, who evidently exercised a kind of authority over the others, wore a picturesque ornament in his cap in the shape of the beak of some bird. A kind of tight-fitting woollen cloak, without sleeves, falling to the knee, resembling that worn by the Thibetans, forms their only garment, while a kind of sporran attached to a string round the waist serves to carry flint and steel, pipe and tobacco, and for all articles in use by the wearer which are not too large.

As arms, they carry bow and arrows, the latter generally poisoned with aconite, most deadly in its effects, long Thibetan knives, and long light spears.

My visitors did not seem at all disinclined to talk about themselves; indeed the presence of my Chinese followers seemed to make them feel quite at home as they recognized them as countrymen of the traders with whom they are familiar in Thibet. My Thibetan boy

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Masu was able to carry on a conversation with one of them who understood a little Thibetan, and I gathered from this man that the Abors have an offensive and defensive alliance with the Thibetans. The tribe trade at all the Thibetan frontier stations, in vegetable medicines which grow in the Abor hills, the Chinese traders readily buying them in exchange for brass pipes, beads, copper pans used for boiling flesh, silver ornaments, salt and yaks. It would seem that while the Abors are not in the least afraid of the Thibetans, being rather feared than otherwise by the latter, they still prefer to adhere to them on account of their trade, as the Thibetan markets are more accessible than that of Sudiya. My visitors volunteered to take me up with them to the first Thibetan station, but beyond that point they told me I could not go, as the Thibetans had given them strict orders to bring neither tea nor Europeans across their frontiers, and they further informed me that their trade with the Thibetans was too important to allow them to go against their neighbours in this matter. After a long talk they proposed that I should take a walk with them round the station, and I was marched off between two of them, who linked their arms in mine, and strutted along like two monkeys.

I had no idea that, notwithstanding the troops in the station, the Assamese could have betrayed such fear of the Abors. As we strolled through the native bazaar, the women bolted into their houses, followed by screaming children, and even the men quietly slunk away, and every street as we passed along was quickly deserted

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signs of fear which greatly amused the Abors, who rolled along half-drunk, singing and shouting at the top of their voices.

After conducting my noisy companions through the entire settlement, I handed them over to the Government agent, a native, whose duty it is to receive the deputations from the different hill tribes, and was glad to get home and change my clothes, as insects innumerable haunted their heads and woollen dress.

After showing myself in public with the Abors, I gained quite a reputation amongst the Assamese, as the Sahib who was going to live amongst the savages, and I am not sure that during the remainder of my stay in Sudiya I was not looked upon as a kind of half-civilized Englishman.

The numerous tribes on our Assamese frontiers have been a source of constant trouble to the authorities. Predatory in their habits, and all more or less given to trafficking in slaves, their annual visits to the plains, until late years, were always attended with scenes of violence and kidnapping, until strong military guards and quick retaliation caused them to pay more respect to a Government which they soon found was determined to maintain law and order.

Of course it was most difficult to inflict punishment in some cases, where the offenders swooping suddenly down on the plains, as suddenly returned with their booty to the hill fastnesses, whither it was often impossible to follow them. The frequency of such flagrant attacks as these rendered it necessary to adopt a line of policy the expediency of which I have heard condemned.

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Some of the tribes such as the Abors, Dufflahs, Nagas, and others had levied tribute from the people of the plains from time immemorial, and were accustomed to receive it as a right. When the Indian Government interfered with their privileges in this respect, the hill tribes resorted to these predatory visits, which were found to be more harassing to the natives of the plains than the previous system of paying yearly tribute. And a knowledge of this fact induced the Government to enter into an arrangement with the different tribes, by which each should receive a yearly present of cloth, beads, &c., as an equivalent for the former tribute, such present to be paid to representatives of the tribes, who should present themselves in Sudiya once a year, and pay homage to the British Government, offering at the same time trifling presents as an acknowledgment of our supremacy. This policy was found to succeed most admirably, and predatory incursions of late years have been few and far between.

When it is considered that, for a yearly expenditure of a few hundreds of pounds coming out of a revenue raised by the lightest and most just taxation, the whole of Northern Assam was relieved from constant invasion and violence, the wisdom of the course adopted by the Indian Government cannot be doubted. It is a curious fact that, while we have only for a few years adopted this system of quieting some of the Indian hill tribes, the Chinese Government commenced (several centuries ago) by a similar system the subjugation of the numerous tribes on her western frontiers, which to-day form

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one of the finest and most effectual frontier guards possessed by any country in the world. Along a hill frontier of over six hundred miles the tribes of Western China form a complete barrier against ingress from the west. The chief of every clan or tribe has a nominal rank conferred upon him, to which is attached a trifling annual stipend. He is furnished with an official dress, which he wears in the presence of all Chinese officials. He is also allowed to visit the Court of Pekin once in five years, at his own expense, if he chooses, as a mark of homage to the Emperor. Such visits, however, are properly discouraged by the Chinese officials, though the nominal privilege of being allowed to go to Pekin is grateful to the pride of the barbarians, and makes them feel that, although subjects paying tribute, they are still persons of consequence, and allies of a powerful empire.

Having personally tested the working of the Chinese system among the tribes along her western frontiers, I should be glad to see the tribes along our hills on the north of India converted into a guard after the same manner, instead of being, as they are at present, a source of constant annoyance and danger.

Savages are not the only danger to be met with in the neighbourhood of Sudiya. The whole country, which is thickly overgrown with the densest jungle, shelters innumerable tigers, leopards, bears, wild elephants, and rhinoceroses, who find undisturbed security amidst the trackless depths of the forests.

The depredations committed by tigers and leopards

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amongst the herds of the Assamese are a source of great complaint. During my stay in Sudiya the natives were constantly reporting 'kills.' One morning, while I was sitting in the verandah of my 'clothes basket,' the Sepoys in the neighbouring hills raised a cry of 'Bagh! bagh!' and, on going to a spot not three hundred yards from the house, I found the newly-killed carcass of a cow. Several animals had been killed in the clearing within a few days, and I had warned the Sepoys not to disturb the tiger, if they saw it, but to inform me quietly, so that I might get a shot; but they could not resist yelling on this occasion, when they saw the ferocious beast at work on his bleeding prey. But for their folly I could have killed the brute from the verandah. As it was, he was scared, and I watched in vain for him nearly all night in a tree near to which I had the carcass dragged. But his audacity seemed to increase, for he killed several other bullocks before I left Sudiya.

Towards the middle of October the rains seemed to have fairly yielded to fine weather. I began, therefore, to think seriously of preparing for a start for the Mishmee country, and now difficulties began to rear themselves in my path. Mathews, the half-breed Assamese interpreter, had been fairly frightened out of all intention of proceeding with me through the dreaded tribes; he became sulky, and then sick, signs which were easily interpreted. Starting with this pluckless half-breed was out of the question, so I discharged him, much to his delight, and returned to Debrughur, where,

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after great difficulty, I succeeded in getting a loafer, who had been a sort of Jack-of-all-trades and master of none. He was a West African negro; had been brought up as a sailor; and had served for several years in a Native Artillery Corps in Assam, where he had married a native woman, and acquired the language. He was an inveterate drunkard, but a man of iron constitution and undoubted pluck; in fact, just the sort of man. if he could only be kept from drink. So with him I returned to Sudiya, somewhat elated at having overcome my first difficulty.

On his arrival, my new interpreter was arrested for debt, and I had to hand over twenty pounds to clear him. No sooner was this done than his wife made her appearance, and threatened to arrest him for maintenance, and I was again compelled to relieve him at a further cost of ten pounds. These payments considerably enhanced his value in my estimation, and, as an inducement to keep him by me until we had made a fair start, I bought two or three cases of 'Old Tom,' and gave him a bottle daily. The first evening, under the influence of his beloved bottle, he swore that he would never leave me, and I could see that he was my slave through the influence of gin.

The next thing to be done was to procure a guide through the Mishmee country to the frontiers of Thibet, and I bethought me of the young Khamtee chief, Chowsam, living on the banks of the Tenga-panee river, distant three or four days' journey by boat. I had no sooner conceived the bold idea of asking this chief to

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accompany me than I at once set about preparing for a visit to him, much against the advice of my gin-drinking interpreter and his native friends, who would as soon have thought of trusting themselves alone in Chowsam's country as of walking into the jaws of a tiger. I was confident, however, that he was my man; everything I had heard of him made me more eager to secure his services. He was described as proud and haughty, fearless, passionate, and dreaded, not only by the Assamese but by the Mishmees, who pay him tribute.

I had seen him once in Debrughur, when he was on a visit to Captain Gregory, the Commissioner, and his bold, defiant air had prepossessed me in his favour. So my faithful Philip, having full confidence in the judgment of his master, set about making all necessary preparation, and we started for the Tenga-panee river on the 20th October, taking the negro with us as an interpreter.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE KHAMTEE VILLAGE.

The Tenga-panee—Gregory Island—Mahseer Fishing—Chowsam's Village—Cool Reception—First Interview—Chowsam—Gin and Politeness—The Chief's Consent Gained—Khamtee People—Clan System—Houses—The Virgins' House—The Bachelors' House—Morals—Customs—Social Laws—Return.

TWO days poling along the reedy banks of the Brama-pootra brought our dugout to the mouth of the Tenga-panee, entering which we glided into its pellucid stream, and commenced working up against a strong current. An impenetrable jungle grew to the water's edge on either bank, and the stream was so narrow that the giant limbs of the forest trees in many places almost formed a canopy overhead, casting a sombre shade in keeping with the solemn silence which reigned around. Ever and anon our boatmen would strike up their wild boat song, which, echoing through the forest, would startle myriads of parrots from their leafy perch, high overhead; these forming themselves into cloud-like flocks, would perform the most wonderful evolutions of flight, while they filled the air with their sharp, shrill screams. Often as we went along a troop of monkeys would follow us, leaping from tree to tree with marvellous agility, and, as though in mockery at our tardy progress,

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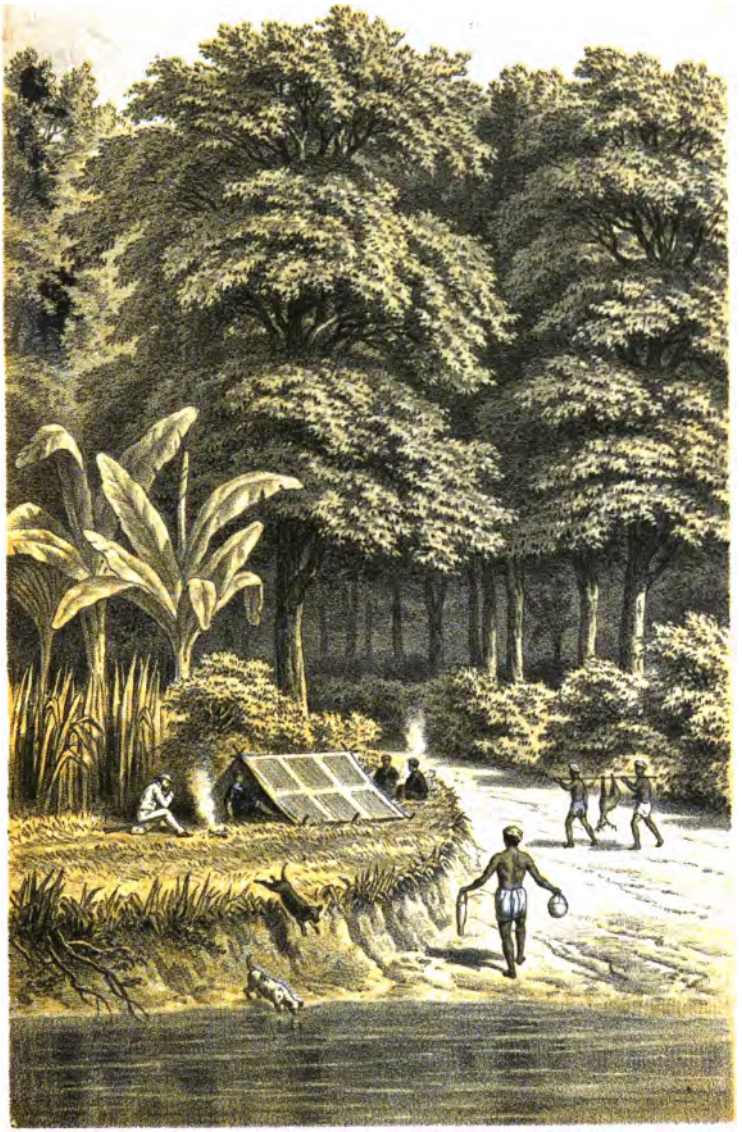

F.Kell. Litho 7. Cooks Court.

OUR CAMP ON THE BRAMAHPOOTRA.

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the whole troop would throw themselves right over our heads, from the boughs of the trees on one bank to those on the other, and then scamper off into the jungle, where their hobgoblin chatter would die away in the distance, like the waking remembrance of the sounds heard in some horrible nightmare. After such disturbances as these the prevailing silence of this wild country invariably seemed more intense.

At the end of our first day's journey up the Tengapanee we camped for the night on a small grassy island in mid-river, where the stream had widened out. A more lovely spot I have never beheld. The flat grassy island, some fifty yards long and twenty wide, was spread like a bright green carpet on the river, which looked like a floor of polished ebony, so black was it from the shade cast by the leafy walls of the trees on either bank. The view up stream closed only where the distant perspective, after forming a perfect avenue nearly a mile in length, seemed to unite both banks in a distant haze, and, as though nature had condescended to take a lesson from the art of man, a row of plantain trees, with their long graceful leaves, formed an even hedge of brilliant green, about twelve feet high, along both sides of the avenue.

I pitched my blanket-tent on the upper end of the island, and lighted a fire in front, while my men kindled a large watch fire a few paces off, and as the smoke ascended through the still air in tapering columns, it seemed as though the last touch of this lovely picture was complete.

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Towards sundown I took my rod and line and fished in the river. The mahseer had begun to run up stream in search of limpid pools in which to spawn, so my efforts were soon rewarded with a run, and a heavy fish trotted me up and down the island for a long time, and proved so powerful that I had to call in the assistance of the Domes with their nets before he showed on the grass. When he did he looked quite fourteen pounds, and having grilled him on the embers all hands made a hearty fish supper, served with open-air sauce, after which we turned in, first telling off the first watch for the night, under Philip—a necessary precaution, as we were in the neighbourhood of Singphoo villages, the inhabitants of which are terrible thieves.

We remained on this little island for three days, two of which I was down with fever. In spite of this I enjoyed myself greatly, and left it with considerable regret, not, however, before I had christened it 'Gregory Island,' in honour of my kind friend Captain Gregory, Commissioner of Lukimpore, and buried a bottle containing its name and the date of our visit.

From Gregory Island one day's poling brought us to Chowsam's village. A few villagers that were lounging along the river bank stared at us in silence, the presence of a Sahib seeming to create no other impression than that of supreme indifference, while their unwillingness to answer our enquiries as to the whereabouts of Chowsam seemed greatly to disconcert our boatmen, who proposed that we should drop down the river again a mile or so and pass the night in the jungle. This was a proposition

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that seemed absurd, for even if the people were hostile they would not dare to molest us in their village, besides which I had been advised by Captain Gregory never to camp near a village, but always to go to the village and make its chief responsible for my safety. I therefore gave orders to the crew to take the boat past the village and land me on the grounds belonging to a Bhuddist temple, situated at the upper end. These orders, however, were only carried out under pressure, and when I had landed the boatmen tried to make off down the river, but Philip was too quick for them. He collected their paddles and piled them up, making a seat for me. Having landed all my traps, Philip and the negro set about pitching the tent, and, just as they had finished, a priest from the temple came hastily towards us, apparently angry at our intrusion on the sacred soil. Fortunately the priest could speak Burmese, so I greeted him in that language, with a very low bow, which had a mollifying effect. He nevertheless protested against the tent being pitched in the temple grounds, and on my expressing profound regret at having unwittingly committed a mistake he told me to remain where I was until he sent for Chowsam. By this time some twenty or thirty Khamtee men and women had gathered round, keeping, however, at a respectful distance, and persistently refusing to hold any conversation with us. The priest's command that one of them should go in search of the chief was silently obeyed, and before long a gong sounded and the whole village assembled. Though I knew that there was nothing to fear, the want of hospi-

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tality shown by the Khamtees quite disconcerted me: the withholding of hospitality among the tribes of Asia always signifies enmity, and I feared that I might have to return unsuccessful to Sudiya. A crowd soon approached, and in the centre, conspicuous by his tall figure and haughty air, was Chowsam, with a look in his face anything but reassuring. When he had approached within thirty paces of my tent I left it and advanced towards him a pace or two and held out my hand. This he did not seem to perceive, but, surrounded by the old men of the village he stood before me, and enquired in the Khamtee language why I had sent for him. An unmistakeable look of anger in his fine expressive countenance warned me against further irritating him, so I replied that I was not a British officer but simply a Sahib who sought his hospitality, and wished to speak to him on business. When this reply was interpreted through the negro and a Khamtee who spoke Assamese it seemed to create a feeling in my favour. But Chowsam at first declined to enter the tent, and requested to know my business. I had no notion of commencing acquaintance with him in this manner, so I replied that I could not talk on business matters standing in the open, and besides, I had travelled all day without eating. On hearing this he observed that I should be supplied with rice and fowls, and at once gave orders to some of his attendants to procure everything necessary for the Sahib, even to firewood, which had before been denied to us, the villagers having prevented Philip gathering any on our arrival. Chowsam having so far played the host, without

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unbending from his haughty manner said he would return after I had dined and hear what I had to say.

So far all was well. I was a guest of one of nature's noblemen, and I had spoken to him as to a superior—conduct, on the part of a Sahib, which had taken him by surprise, and would, I felt sure, lead to my securing his services. This thought so elated me as to overcome the feeling of weakness which the fever always left for a day or two, and I made a hearty dinner of rice and boiled fowl. In the evening, about eight o'clock, when the village was apparently wrapt in sleep, and I had begun to fancy that the chief might have forgotten his promise, the negro, who was smoking his pipe outside the tent, reported the approach of Chowsam, who presented himself at the entrance of the tent, without attempting to enter it, and still wearing an air of dignified hauteur. Going out to him, I, after some difficulty, prevailed upon mine host to enter, and then begged him to be seated. This he first refused to do, with an air of energy that pleased me greatly, for it showed that I had overcome his haughtiness. At last, after my telling him that I was his guest and he was the ruler of Khamtees and a chief, and thus my superior, he took a seat himself with a pleased smile, which sat on his handsome countenance with as much grace as his previous look of haughty pride. Philip now produced tea and pipes. Accepting a pipe with great gravity, he handed the tea to his chief elder, who had also entered the tent. A silence now ensued, during which I had leisure to observe Chowsam more closely. He was a spare, tall man, over six feet

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in height, and apparently about thirty years of age, with well-proportioned limbs and very erect, graceful carriage. His face was a perfect study in itself. A very high smooth forehead denoted intellect, while his delicately pencilled and almost straight eyebrows seemed to give a soft expression to deep-set glittering black eyes, which alternately flashed out keen looks of intelligence, then became cold and calm. A finely-chiselled Roman nose with small compressed nostrils which expanded when he smiled, and a longish curled upper lip resting firmly on the lower one, gave to the lower half of his face that haughty, expressive look already spoken of. The small firm mouth looked hard and cruel, but unless this feature was studied alone its expression was not noticed, as his face generally wore a look of imperturbability that irresistibly attracted attention. I have been thus particular in describing Chowsam, as I believe him to be one of the cleverest and most influential Khamtee chiefs in Northern Assam, and one whom the Government would do well to treat with consideration.

After we had smoked some time in silence, I told Philip, in Chinese, to produce a bottle of gin, and insisted on Chowsam and his elders, several of whom had now seated themselves in the tent, taking a glass each, which they drank with evident satisfaction, and I then began to approach the chief on the subject of my visit, our conversation still being carried on through the negro and a Khamtee who spoke Assamese. Knowing that he had been in the Mishmee country on a mission to the Thibetans beyond, I asked him to describe the country

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and people, as I wished to pass through them on the way to Bathang, in Thibet. Whether it was that he wished to imbue me with a proper sense of the dangers that he had encountered, or whether he felt jealous of a European going amongst them, and thus robbing him of the reputation of being the only person of consequence who had so far had access to their country, I could not then understand; he certainly drew a very vivid, and I must say correct, picture of their savageness, and ended by saying that it would be madness for me to attempt to go through their country alone.

In this description Chowsam had dropped the Khamtee tongue, and spoke fluently in Assamese, a proceeding which considerably increased my admiration of him, and when he finished talking I took care to proffer him another glass of Old Tom, which he drank with the same pleased dignity as he had done the first.

My object was to soften the heart of mine host, and the second glass of spirit caused him to draw a long sigh of comfort, so I continued the conversation by saying, that I had come to see him because it was well known that he was the only man who could go among the Mishmees and take a Sahib with him, and that I had no intention of going into their country except in company with himself.

Having spoken thus, I paused to watch the effect on him. That he was flattered was evident, but he took some moments to frame a reply, which he delivered very slowly and with great dignity. 'I am the head of the Khamtees and the father of my people; it is not good

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that I should leave them so much, but I am a servant of the Kumpani,* and if the Commissioner Sahib tells me to take you, I will, but not otherwise.'

Now, as the Government had already distinctly warned me that any advance into Thibet must be made at my own risk, I knew that Captain Gregory, however much he might wish me success, could not give Chowsam any such orders. Under these circumstances, Chowsam's reply was not encouraging, so I helped myself to a glass of gin, as much to cover my disappointment as to gain time for reflection, then gravely filling up the glasses of Chowsam and his elders, when each glass was empty, I resumed the subject.

Before proceeding further it was necessary to make the chief understand that I was not an official, and it was with some difficulty that he was at last made to understand the object which tempted me to risk my life by passing through the Mishmee country. When he did, his manner completely changed; he offered me his hand, and promised at once that he would take me, provided the Commissioner did not object. My joy was great now, and from this time a friendship sprung up between this brave chief and myself, which I never had reason to repent of.

The rest of the night we spent in chatting and smoking, and it was not until an early hour next morning that our party broke up, Chowsam and his elders leaving, all the better for Old Tom, with repeated

* A term applied to the Indian Government throughout the hill tribes of Assam, denoting the East India Company.

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declarations of friendship, and a promise to come and see me early next morning.

To speak of the Khamtees as a tribe is to do them little justice, for there is that about the word tribe which conveys the idea of wildness and want of culture, very far from forming a characteristic of the Khamtees, for from some of their social laws even civilised nations might take a lesson.

The great stronghold of the Khamtees is in the neighbourhood of the Irrawaddy, in the extreme north of Burmah, the Khamtees of Assam being emigrants from that country under the leadership of Chowsam's father. In religion they affect to be strict followers of Burmese Bhuddism, but, excepting among the priests, their religion is little more than polytheism under a thin veil of Bhuddist pantheism, the beauty of Gautama's teaching being utterly unknown amongst them, while many of their customs are altogether opposed to Bhuddism. They kill and eat all animals, and use the flesh and milk of cows and buffaloes without scruple. Their priests are men of great importance, and their influence is greater even than that of the chiefs. No undertaking is commenced without first consulting them, and by pretended divinations they select and announce an auspicious day. They are also the schoolmasters, every free-born Khamtee youth being compelled to attend school in the temples, where he learns to read and write his own language, and often Burmese using the Burmese written characters for both languages These priests receive their office from Bhuddistic institutions in Burmah, and are, without exception, strictly

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orthodox among themselves, though they seem to indulge the whims of the Khamtees in many religious forms and ceremonies foreign to Bhuddism. I was very much surprised to find no trace of monotheism among this people. To all appearance they seem to have been converted by followers of Bhudda from polytheism direct to pantheism, and in this present a striking example of the strength of Bhuddism when preached to polytheists.

The Khamtees are divided into innumerable clans, each clan having its own village and chief or Gohain, and curiously enough each clan is recognised by the pattern of the waist cloths worn by the men. The villages vary in size according to the strength of the clan. That of Chowsam numbered about forty houses, scattered about without any attempt at regularity. The houses are all built on bamboo piles as in Burmah, and entered by a ladder. The flooring and walls consist of closely interlaced bamboo work, and the roofs are thatched with grass, the eaves projecting below the level of the floor. The interior is divided into several rooms communicating by doors; one room, devoted to the reception of guests, is entirely open at one end with a sort of balcony outside. Each room contains a moveable hearth without any chimney, which is moved about the room at the will of the occupants, and as an appendage of the hearth there is a rough wooden couch covered with an embroidered carpet, in the manufacture of which the Khamtee women are very skilful. The only other articles of furniture are a pair of iron fire-tongs and a small teapot. Their food is generally served in lacquered bowls and dishes, except-

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ing in the case of slaves and poor people, who use common earthenware. All cooking is carried on in the women's room, which, of course, I never entered. The interiors of the houses occupied by well-to-do people are very clean and tidy, forming a pleasing contrast to those of other frontier tribes in Assam. The streets or lanes of the village, however, are very filthy; the want of drainage leaves them in a constant state of mire, and innumerable pigs, dogs, and poultry of every description running at large do not add to the general comfort of a walk through the village.

Some of the social laws are very curious. At either end of every village there is a large house set apart for a singular purpose. At the age of puberty all the girls are sent from the house of their parents to one of these buildings called the House of the Virgins, and reserved entirely for the dwelling-place of unmarried women. From the time that the young girl enters this place she never sleeps anywhere else until married. Rising at daylight in the morning she repairs to the house of her parents, spends the day there assisting in the household duties, and returns to her sleeping place with the other unmarried females at sun-down. As with the girls so with the boys. They occupy the house at the opposite end of the village, and every youth, though he spends the day in the house of his father, at night must return to the bachelors' sleeping place.

The Virgins' House is sacred, and no man is supposed to enter there; indeed, the vigilance of the old maids who have outlived the age of romance, prevents any

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proceeding which might be termed scandalous, and the morality of a Khamtee village is a pleasing contemplation.

When a young man desires to make choice of a wife, he asks the consent of his and her parents, and having gained both, he may pay his addresses until he is in a position to build a house for the reception of his bride. Long courtships are not uncommon, and it is a pretty sight to see the young men escorting their intended brides at sun-down to their sleeping house, lingering about which many youthful couples may be seen, as the sun sinks to rest, wishing each other good night with gentle voices and looks of love.

In the early morning, too, the young lovers meet, the youth gallantly escorting his fair one to her parents' house, while she, rosy with health, would shame our European beauties, for at sunrise she appears fresh after an elaborate toilet, of which a bathe in the river forms a most important part.

The costume of both men and women is extremely picturesque. That of the women, who are good-looking, is very becoming. A loose fitting jacket of white silk or cotton, with long full sleeves, buttoned down the chest, covers the upper part of the body to their waist ; a piece of striped silk or cotton cloth fastened round the waist, falls like classic drapery to the ankles, displaying the outlines of their well-shaped limbs; while this skirt-like garment, having a kind of open fold in front, occasionally affords a glimpse of a rounded limb of the most perfect symmetry. They wear no covering for the head ;

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but their hair, which is raven black and generally very abundant, is worn in a large chignon on the top of the head, and fastened with large silver pins highly ornamented. They also wear earrings or rather solid discs of gold or silver, not pendant, but fixed in the lobe of the ear, which is completely slit and not merely pierced. As bracelets they wear heavy rings of gold and silver. The precious metals for these ornaments are obtained from the rich gold and silver mines which are found in the hills forming the boundaries of Burmah on the north, and the manufacture of jewellery is a monopoly of the chiefs, who are the gold and silversmiths of the village, and derive considerable profit from the exercise of their handicraft.

The costume of the men consists of a close-fitting jacket of white cotton, with tight long sleeves rolled up over the wrists, and buttoned down the chest; a piece of checked cotton cloth secured round the waist, and several yards in length, is looped up between the legs, giving somewhat the appearance of Turks' trousers, while a very white strip of cloth is twisted and tied round the head in the shape of a puggaree, with the ends sticking up over the forehead, the hair being twisted into a knot on the top of the head. The men also wear earrings and bracelets like the women. As arms they carry a heavy knife of splendid temper and as sharp as a razor, made from the steel manufactured in the Khamtee country on the north of Burmah. The blade is about eighteen inches in length, increasing in width from the handle to about two inches at the point, which is square. The

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Khamtees are inveterate traders, and to their industry Northern Assam is much indebted for the best rice and vegetables, especially potatoes. Although the chief is lord of the soil, the whole community till it on the co-operative system, the chief having his portion allotted to him; after which the produce is equally divided between each house, according to the number of hands in it who have helped in the cultivation. As slavery is an institution among them, well-to-do Khamtees never labour. Besides the common land small plots are also cultivated by individuals. Free-born people also possess numerous herds of tame buffaloes and oxen used for tilling the ground, and also as a means of barter with the Mishmees.

All the grain produced by a village is kept in public storehouses always built on the river bank, so as to be near water in case of fire; and the chief's man of business, or tax collector, attends at one of these houses at daylight every morning to serve out the paddy to every house, a member from which attends to receive the daily supply, and the produce of all grain sent to market from these stores is accounted for by the chief, who distributes it *pro ratâ* among the different houses.

As a rule, all the free men are hunters, very few of them doing manual labour, and in this they are very expert, both on land and water, handling a boat among the rapids in an unrivalled manner. They are also the soldier guardians of the clan, as well as the merchants who trade with the Assamese, and other tribes; while the older men, who are beyond leading such an active life, assist the chief as counsellors of the community. In

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physique, the Khamtees are superior to any of their neighbours, and conspicuous for their light complexions. Their national characteristic seems to be an exceeding restlessness. Where unchecked, predatory habits are the delight of the warriors, and the murderous readiness to use their knives makes them much dreaded, while their mode of warfare, which consists of early morning surprisals, with fire and sword, has caused them to gain a deserved name for treachery.

As I had been so successful with Chowsam during our carousal over night, I determined to leave him next morning, before he had time to change his mind; and we had just finished stowing the dugout, when he and three of his principal men arrived. I greeted him cheerily, and he replied with a good-natured shake of his head, and an observation that I had been too many for him and his elders the night before. He pressed me to stay another day or two, but I declined, as I had much to do in Sudiya, where I would await his arrival. My real object was to avoid giving his elders a chance of arguing the expediency of their chief undertaking the journey. Finding me determined to start, he walked down the river bank with me, and, on arriving opposite his house, a number of women came out, bringing quantities of fowls, pork, rice, honey, and sweetmeats. Having stowed these, I shook hands with my host, who again asked if I was determined to go through the Mishmee country, and, on my telling him that with his aid I feared nothing, he replied, 'Good; I will meet you in Sudiya on the tenth day of the next moon.' So we parted, and I returned to Sudiya to wait the appointed time.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE TENGA-PANEE.

Native Officials—Chowsam's Terms—Return to Tenga-panee—Pleasant Reception—Bachelors' Quarters—The Priest and his Omens—Attacked by Monkeys—Torchlight Fishing—A Pastoral Visit—Our Coolies—The Departure—The Medicine Chest—Farewell Addresses—My Elder Brother.

TRUE to his promise, Chowsam appeared in Sudiya on the appointed day, November 13, but declined final arrangements until the arrival of the Commissioner.

The chief's behaviour was mysterious. Whenever the subject of the Mishmee country was touched on, he shook his head, and changed the conversation. This conduct was puzzling until the cause was discovered. Chowsam spent a good deal of time in the bazaar, in company with a Native official, whose duty it was to look after the tribes; and Philip, to whom I had confided the task of finding out the influences at work on Chowsam, soon discovered that the Native officials were averse to a European visiting the Mishmees, the fact being that they have considerable influence among the tribes, and are not, perhaps, very scrupulous in using it. Having made this discovery, I remained inactive till the arrival of Captain Gregory, on the 23rd of November. Before

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I had seen him, Chowsam came and declared that it would be impossible for him to accompany me, as a man named Harden, the chief political Native officer, had assured him that, in the event of anything happening, the Government would not take notice of it. Under these circumstances, to travel among the tribes would be 'walking against the knife.' The chief was unmistakeably alarmed. This interference of the Native officials, by publishing me as a man out of the pale of Government protection, would obviously prove fatal, if unchecked. I at once paid Captain Gregory a visit, and explained matters to him. He could not interfere, or give Chowsam any guarantee of protection, but his evident friendliness and sympathy inspired Chowsam with confidence, and after our interview, I invited the chief to my quarters for the purpose of having a talk. I reminded him that the murder of Messrs. Crick and Bourie, the two French missionaries, a few years before, had been avenged on the Meju Mishmees. If such steps had been taken in the case of men who were not Englishmen, how much more would the Government be likely to avenge the murder of our party of eleven British subjects? This argument settled the matter, and I proceeded to conclude arrangements with the chief. For his services as guide and Mishmee interpreter, and the expenses of the journey to Thibet, I gave him four hundred rupees, and secured to his family, in case of his death, the sum of five hundred rupees. I also paid in advance two months' pay, at thirty rupees per month each, for six of his men as porters. By this plan

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I travelled as a perfectly 'vacuus viator,' without a pice in my pocket, and secured against the risk of either treachery or attack for the sake of plunder. There was no obstacle now to detain us. If all went well, we should reach the frontier of Thibet about the middle of February, where I had determined to remain until the melting of the snow in April.

During our stay at Sudiya, both Lowtzang and Masu had suffered so acutely from fever that it proved impossible to take them any further. Lowtzang's absence was of little consequence, but thus to lose the services of Masu, as a Thibetan interpreter, and just as they were needed, was provoking, after bringing him so many thousand miles; however, his loss was not irreparable. I could make myself pretty well understood in the Chinese language, and, besides this, I relied a little on Philip to serve as interpreter in Eastern Thibet, where Chinese is a good deal spoken. Fortunately, my friend Jenkins volunteered his willingness to take the boys, and make them useful on his plantation, until our return. To his plantation on the Dehing they were accordingly despatched, the lad Masu so ill that I never expected to see him again.

The waters of the Bramapootra were now very low, and the weather quite cool; the sun was not too hot during the day to render walking without an umbrella unpleasant, while the nights were cold enough to render a fire in the tent an absolute necessity—indeed the night we camped on Gregory Island brought on another very bad attack of fever, and every fresh attack from this

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time seemed more weakening, but the fever had become so much a matter of course, that I cared very little about it as yet, and we once more arrived at Chowsam's village in safety.

This time our arrival was marked by very different conduct on the part of the Khamtees. In place of the former indifference and scant civility, the whole village turned out on the river bank to welcome us, and conspicuous in the centre stood Chowsam and his elders, who conducted me with marks of great respect to the Bachelors' quarters, where it is usual to entertain male strangers, and which were comfortably prepared for our reception. The building contained only one room, about thirty feet long by fifteen broad, built entirely of bamboo wicker-work, and thatched with grass; there was no furniture, but the sides of the walls were hung with nets, cross-bows, knives and spears.

During the evening I heard that the priest had not yet fixed a day for our final setting out, so early next morning I despatched Philip with a few trifling presents, and kind messages. This was necessary in order that his reverence might discover some good omens for our journey, without which the chief would start in bad spirits, and amidst the lamentations of his people, foreboding and causing delay if not disaster. In the course of the day it was announced that the third sunrise hence would be a propitious time for setting out—which gave us three days to become better acquainted with the Khamtees.

Chowsam and his people did all they could to make the time pass agreeably. The former on the first day showed

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me over his rice fields, some five hundred acres in extent, carefully cleared from the forest, and well irrigated by means of tiny canals leading from the Tenga-panee.

While we were walking around, a curious incident occurred, illustrative of the dangers attending a life in these wild districts. At the opposite side of the clearing a number of young women and boys were reaping paddy, and our attention was suddenly attracted to this group, by the loud screams of the females. Their excitement was so great that we hurried towards them, and on approaching near, a troop of large monkeys were descried making towards the jungle. It appeared that the monkeys had come out of the jungle and attacked the women, evidently intent upon robbing them of the rice and sweetmeats, which they often carry into the fields with them, but being disappointed in their hopes, they had commenced biting all the terrified females, and tearing their clothes. What the ultimate end of this attack would have been, was difficult to say, had not some of the lads armed with knives killed two of the largest males and thus scared the rest. On another occasion during our stay in the Khamtee village, a young man came dragging three of these huge monkeys after him, which he had killed with his knife. The three had attacked him so closely that he had cut them down one after the other, the head of one having been taken clean off; the youth, however, had been frightfully bitten in the contest, about his arms and legs. These monkeys are the terror of the women and children, and many tales are told of their ferocity, and of adventures almost incredible with them.

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On the first evening of my sojourn, Chowsam gave orders for a fishing excursion by torch-light, a most exciting sport, for which the Khamtees, above all the neighbouring tribes, are celebrated. After dinner, we sat in the Bachelors' Hall, talking over the prospects of the journey until ten o'clock, when a number of the young men who were sleeping around were roused, and active preparations at once begun for fishing. Torches of the pine wood, immense quantities of which drift down the Bramapootra every summer from Thibet, were lighted, dugouts manned, and cast-nets carefully arranged for use. When all was prepared I took my seat in the middle of a dugout, about eighteen feet long and as many inches wide, Chowsam and the elders bidding us good night and plenty of sport. It was a lovely night, very dark but clear, the stars overhead twinkling with great brilliancy in the absence of the young moon, which had already disappeared below the western horizon.

Before coming to the best fishing ground we had to descend the Tenga-panee for a couple of miles, amidst great excitement, but perfect quiet; the descent of the rapids in the dark was very exciting; the admirable skill and coolness of the Khamtees rendered the navigation perfectly safe, while the great quiet only broken occasionally by the mimic roar of the small rapids, and the dense blackness of the night, heightened by the shade thrown over the river from the walls of giant forest trees, threw around our expedition a delightful air of enchantment.

Having arrived at a deep pool, the three boats, which

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had kept pretty well together, though each quite unseen by the occupants of the other, came to a stand-still, as though arrested by some invisible hand, for no sound of paddle or grating of keel on the stony bottom of the river denoted any effort being made to bring up; but we were motionless, held by our steersman, who, standing erect in the stern, grasped an overhanging branch. Below us the other two dugouts were brought up in a similar manner. Some few minutes were spent in making fast the painters, when we swung round head to stream; then, at the signal of a low whistle, the torches were suddenly kindled, and a red glare illuminated the wild midnight scene around us. In the bow of each boat sat a man holding a torch, while another amidships stood up with his cast-net ready on his arm, making signs to the steersman to sweep the dugout a little in shore towards a spot where I saw three large fish motionless, save for a tremulous vibration of the tail, as though fascinated by the unusual light. We approached within a proper distance: the fatal net glanced for a moment in the torchlight, then fell in a circle of some six feet over the fish. In the meanwhile the netsmen in the other dugouts had espied more fish, and with the same good fortune made capture of no less than eight large fish, weighing on an average ten to twelve pounds each, which were soon floundering in the boats.

The moment that the nets were thrown, the Khamtees commenced shouting and singing in the wildest manner, their demoniac yells being caught up by troops of hulluk monkeys in the neighbouring jungles, and a com-

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motion was raised that might have made any one less used to wild life fancy that he was present at some midnight incantation.

In this manner we fished down stream for several miles, only leaving off when the crowing of the jungle cocks announced the approach of daybreak. The sport was very good, no less than thirty-seven fine fish were taken from our dugouts when we landed at the village next morning at sunrise, welcomed with loud praises by the girls and men who had assembled to greet us.

Though our party had done nothing extraordinary in the way of a catch, the old men and maidens of course ascribed the good fortune attending the expedition to the presence of Koopah Sahib, and I was soon indebted to the thoughtful care of Chowsam's women-kind for a sumptuous breakfast, in which grilled fish played a most important and pleasing part.

Having been up all night I fell asleep almost immediately after breakfast, and slept till near sun-down, when Chowsam, attended by his wife and some female slaves, called me to get up and partake of dinner, which was neatly spread out on the floor. As I was hardly ready for the meal, Chowsam proposed a dip in the river above the village, where there was a deep pool. This was a luxury not to be refused, so off we started and took our swim before an admiring crowd of men and boys who stood on the bank. After this we returned to dinner, at which I was joined by Chowsam and some of his elders, with whom I spent a very pleasant night.

Next day I was down with the fever, brought on by

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the exposure of the night's fishing; but the kindness of Chowsam and his wife, who paid their guest every attention, even to keeping me supplied with acidulated drinks, made from dried sour pomiloes, enabled me to throw it off and get about next day.

On the third morning, as we were sitting at breakfast, the priest paid me a visit in return for the presents sent to him. After seating himself, the reverend gentleman announced the result of his divinations. Besides one or two good omens of general success, he foretold that the following day would be propitious for a start. To testify my gratitude for his great interest in a stranger, I ordered Philip to give him a string of large yellow glass beads for a rosary, a piece of liberality on the part of the stranger Sahib which drew forth approving remarks not only from the disciple of Buddha, but also from the Khamtees, while the astute chief, seeing my drift, winked his eye expressively. After this the priest said he wished to give me a word of advice before leaving, and proceeded to say that the journey before me was one of great peril, and from his calculations there appeared to be a great danger awaiting me; in what shape, however, he could not tell, but, by observing great caution, I would escape it. Having thus delivered himself, he gathered his flowing yellow garments about him, and, with a polite bow, solemnly departed.

For the rest of the day the whole village seemed alive with the preparations for our departure. Chowsam paid the six men who were to act as porters two months' wages in advance, in the presence of all the elders

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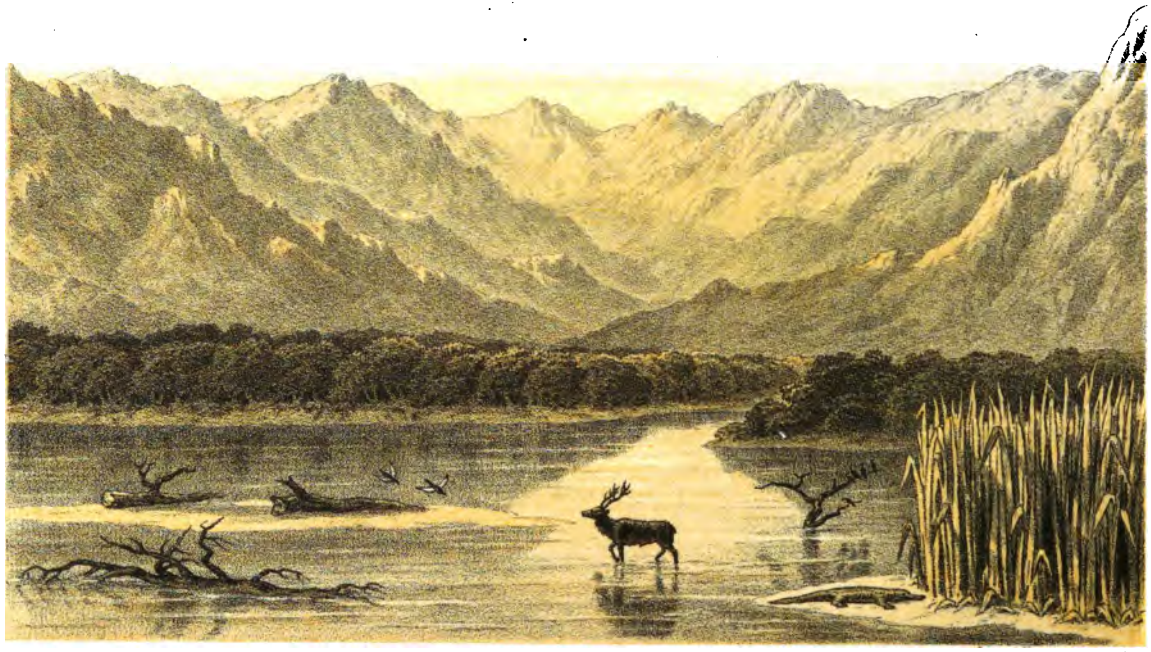

C.F.Kell Litho. 7 Cooks Court
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RIVER SCENE ON THE BRAMAHPOOTRA. THE MOUTH OF THE DEHONG

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assembled round the hearth in my quarters. As each man came up to receive his pay, the services which were required of him during the journey were solemnly enumerated by one of the old men, and they then prepared for the journey. They made themselves little water-tight oblong baskets of reeds and rattans, about fourteen inches in diameter and two feet long. These, slung on their backs by means of broad bands of finely-plaited bamboo, were to hold our provisions and goods. Their knives were all carefully sharpened, cross-bows attended to, and their arrows poisoned. Each man was furnished by Chowsam with a new cloth and turban; and it was not until a late hour in the evening that all preparations were completed. Our last night was again spent in revelry, the chief and his elders smoking and drinking after I had retired until a very late hour.

From all I had seen and heard during the previous three days, it was evident that the Khamtees felt that their chief had entered upon a very hazardous undertaking, and, in spite of the hilarity kept up in order to do honour to the Sahib's visit, there was no little anxiety felt by the older people for the safety of the party, their chief being unmistakably beloved by them and looked up to as one who did well for his clan.

Next morning, ere the village cocks crew in honour of the approaching day, a gong in Chowsam's house sounded at intervals of a few seconds, and at dawn of day the whole of the village people—men, women, and children—were gathered round my quarters. Presently

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Chowsam, followed by his elders, and the coolies to carry our baggage, advanced in a grave procession through the crowd. The chief first, and next the elders, who, when the chief had taken a seat by me, ranged themselves in a circle round the fire, while the coolies stood respectfully in a row near the entrance. One by one each cooly was called up and harangued by Chowsam in the presence of the elders, and then the articles which he had to carry were handed to him. Three men carried the whole of the personal baggage belonging to Chowsam, to myself, Philip, and the negro, twenty pounds' weight being allotted to each. My blanket-tent, fryingpan, fork, two flat tin plates and tin pot—the latter articles forming my kitchen utensils and dinner service—formed a load for another man, while three others carried our stores of tea, dried fish, raw rice, and baked rice powdered and mixed with sugar; this preparation, being light and highly nutritious, forms an excellent article of food for travellers to carry with them in marches through wild countries, where provisions are scarce.

The last man now stepped forward to receive his load, which, as comprising our bank, medicine chest, wine cellar, and bread store, was most valuable. On opening my packet of medicines—which had consisted of two ounces of quinine, a small bottle of steel drops, six dozen purgative pills, one bottle of chlorodyne, one stick of caustic, and one pot of Holloway's ointment—one bottle of quinine, the stick of caustic, the pot of ointment, and steel drops were found to be missing. This was

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very annoying, as the red leeches, common in the lower ranges of the Assam hills, are very venomous, so much so that, unless their bites are cauterised, bad sores are formed. The ointment I had already proved to be a successful safeguard against the leeches of the plains, and I confess that the prospect of being thus at the mercy of the leeches was not pleasing; but, though very angry at this theft, I did not like to say anything, for fear of making the chief uncomfortable. The articles must have been purloined by a skilful thief, and one who knew the value of caustic, which was scarcely to be expected of any of the Khamtees; and this reflection awakened strong suspicions against the negro, whose unsolicited protests of innocence afterwards, when I spoke to Philip about it, confirmed me in laying the theft at his door.

Provoking as the loss was, it was no use thinking over it, and from the precautions of the elders in taking a list of all the articles confided to each man, I was secure against theft for the future. When the last had received his load, all the villagers were admitted, or as many as could find standing room in the building, as I thought, for the purpose of leave taking. Perfect silence ensued, till the oldest of the elders stood up, and addressed me somewhat as follows: 'Koopah Sahib,—You are about to start on a long and dangerous journey. After you leave us constant dangers will beset you—a stranger to the country and people amongst whom you will have to travel. Under these circumstances, we confide you to the care of our gohain, who will be responsible for you

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with his life, and we beg of you to give us your word that you will intrust yourself entirely to his guidance. You must act towards him as to an elder brother; on every occasion be guided by his advice, no matter how much it may be against your wish.' He then proceeded to say that 'the village had assembled to bid us farewell, and acknowledge the responsibility of the clan for my safety.' Having spoken, he sat down, and as all eyes were turned to me, I rose, and thanked the Khamtees for their kindness, and solemnly promised, with upraised hand, to abide by the advice of the elder, and treat Chowsam henceforth as an elder brother. This ceremony having been concluded, Chowsam addressed his people (confiding them to the care of their elders during his absence), in what must have been impressive language, for many of the women audibly sobbed, while the men hung their heads as though unable to look their chief in the face, and see there the working of a countenance betraying great emotion. When Chowsam had finished, numbers of presents of sweetmeats were handed to me by the women; in fact, so many were showered upon me, that the gohain at last interfered, and we made a move from the house to the river bank, accompanied by the crowd, in perfect silence. Just before getting into the boat, I turned, and raising my hands above my head, made a bow to the people as a parting salutation, which, though not according to their custom, was understood and returned by them. Chowsam was the last to embark, and as he stood alone on the bank, it was an affecting sight to see most of the young

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men come, one after the other, and bend the knee before him as a mark of respect. The last man having paid his homage, Chowsam entered the dugout, and we shot across the river, disembarked, and set out on our journey.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRAMAKUND.

Frontier Forests — Hulluk Monkeys—Mhitton — Land Leeches — Honey Hunting—The Buffalo Bull—The Camlang-panee—Trying the Sahib —A Night in a Nullah—Edible Beetles—The Bramakund—Sacred Fish—Mishmee Message—The Mishmee Tribes—Chullah Cottahs—Degaroos—Dress—Arms—Ornaments.

OUR route, for about a mile, lay along the right bank of the Tenga-panee, then led off through dense tree jungle, which had overgrown the site of a large Khamtee village, built by Chowsam's father, but abandoned after the Khamtee defeat at Sudiya. Leaving these faint traces of man's industry, we entered deeper into the forest. The order of march of the party, consisting of twelve men and two slaves, had been arranged by Chowsam, and was never afterwards varied. Three men, in single file, went ahead some fifty yards, then came Chowsam, closely followed by myself and Philip, while the rest of our men, with the negro who had charge of my two bulldogs, formed the rear-guard, about twenty yards behind. As we strode silently along in the twilight of the forest, with a canopy of dense foliage overhead, a full sense of the wild life opening before us made my heart leap again, and I seemed, as we penetrated farther

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into the wilderness, to throw off the lethargy of months, and to breathe with freedom. Our home, for some time, would be the forest, a delightful prospect but for fever and leeches; nothing could exceed the beauty of the luxuriant foliage which shaded us from the noonday sun. The tall poma trees (*Cedrela toona*) and the giant-like himolu (*Bombax malabaricum*), towering above trees of smaller growth, let down from their branches festoons of ratans, which hung gracefully on the lesser trees, as though placed there by the hands of wood nymphs. Often as we walked along under these dense masses of foliage, the sound of our footsteps would disturb a colony of hulluk monkeys, which scampered off, uttering the mournful screams of 'hullu, hullu.' So quick are these little black apes in their movements among the branches, that though I have often seen the branches of the trees trembling beneath the weight of their bodies, I never saw one in a wild state. They are grotesque little creatures, standing, when full grown, from sixteen to eighteen inches high, black, with very long arms, and when tamed make very gentle and amusing pets. Confinement seems rather fatal to them, as they are difficult to rear. Though so very nimble among trees, they are very helpless on the ground, as they walk upright, and the natives, especially the Mishmees, who hunt near the foot of the hills, catch many of them during the dry season, when they have to leave the forest and go in search of water. There are, besides these, many varieties of monkeys in the Assam jungles, of which the most troublesome are the large grey sort already mentioned.

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Just before mid-day, as we were quietly pursuing our march, the coolies in front suddenly shouted to us, and this warning was immediately followed by angry snorts and a tremendous stampede on our right front, and before I had time to look round Chowsam pulled me back, and each made for a tree,* and the whole party in this manner just managed to escape out of the way of a herd of mhitton,† which, having drawn together in a compact body, crashed through the forest direct across our path, and, with heads down until their nostrils almost touched their breasts, bore down all the smaller trees in their way. I could easily have planted a ball in the fine old bull which piloted the herd as I covered the shoulder of the fierce animal, and it required an effort to restrain myself from pulling trigger. It was well that I had sufficient discretion to resist the temptation, for of all denizens of the Assam forest none are more dangerous to encounter afoot than the bull mhitton. Buffaloes will generally run, when hit, in covert, but the bull mhitton charges on first sight of the enemy, and if wounded becomes a most determined assailant, and from the tenacity with which he will follow up his enemy is more to be feared than the rhinoceros.

As the noise of the retreating herd died away in the depths of the forest all our party mustered again, and we halted for the mid-day meal.

A space several yards in diameter was speedily

* Illustration.

† Bos frontalis: an animal somewhat resembling a cross between a bull and a buffalo.

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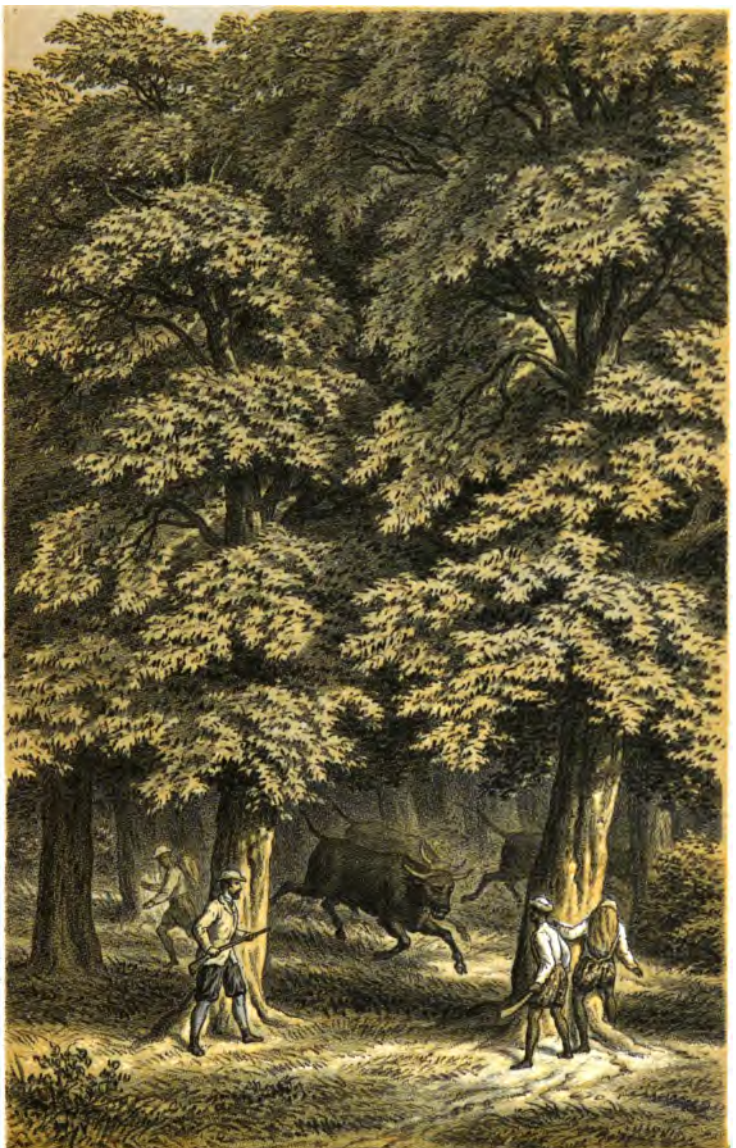

C.F.Kell. Lith^b. 7. Cooks Court

"EACH MAN MADE FOR A TREE"

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cleared of dwarf jungle by the effective knives of our men, and we sat down to dried fish and cold rice. In the excitement of the mhitton charge and the chaff which ensued amongst our party—each one whimsically describing with pantomimic gestures the celerity with which his neighbour had made himself scarce—I quite forgot the leeches until a series of sharp pricks on the neck and legs roused me to a sense of their attentions. One of the Khamtees disposed of three that were comfortably enjoying a bloody repast from the veins of my neck, and by dint of partially undressing half a dozen more that had commenced operations on my legs were dispossessed, each leaving behind them a long tiny stream of blood. Of all the hardships and unpleasant sensations experienced in the Assam jungle none have left a more disagreeable recollection than the attacks of land leeches. Often, on sitting down, I could count a dozen of these little animals hurrying from all directions to their prey. In length they are about an inch, while their thickness does not exceed that of an ordinary sewing needle. Their mode of progression is curious in the extreme. Fixing one extremity by means of its bell-shaped sucker firmly on a leaf or on the ground, the leech curves itself into an arch, the other end is then advanced till the creature resembles a loop, again to expand into an arch, but the movement is quicker than words can describe it; the rapidity with which they thus progress along is quite startling. As they occasionally rear themselves perpendicularly and sway about from side to side, taking a survey round them in quest of prey, the observer

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cannot fail to conceive a dread of the bloodthirsty little creatures.* They exercised quite a fascination over me. I could never resist watching them whenever I took a seat. Their power of scent was evidently keen. At first they would hold themselves erect, then suddenly, as though they had just discovered my whereabouts, they would throw themselves forward and with quick eager strides make towards my unfortunate body, and it was a long time before I could restrain a shudder at their approach, but use does wonders, and at last I used to flip them off my clothes and hands, Khamtee fashion, with great indifference.

There are several species of leeches in Assam, but I have only come in contact with three kinds: the common brown one, just described; the red, or hill leech, which is larger than the former and of a light red colour, inflicting a venomous, though not dangerous, bite; and the hair leech, so called by the Khamtees from its great length and extreme tenuity. This last description of leech lies in wait in the grass, and as animals feed it enters the nostrils and fixes itself firmly in the interior, where it takes up permanent quarters, causing the poor beasts great irritation. It seems to inflict itself entirely on animals, which is fortunate, or man would suffer greatly from this scourge of the jungle.

By way of amusement after dinner Chowsam ordered one of his men to get some honey from a cavity in the trunk of a dead poma tree, and as the hive was fully sixty feet from the ground I had an opportunity of

* Illustration.

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seeing the Khamtee mode of ascending a tree. Cutting down a tall bamboo, thirty or forty feet long, he lashed pieces a foot long crosswise, forming a kind of ladder; then, placing the bamboo upright against the tree, he ascended it a few feet, stopped, and lashed it to the trunk by means of a strip of bamboo, which he repeated at intervals; when he had reached the top of the bamboo another smaller one was handed to him prepared in the same manner as the first, this he secured as he had done the other, and in this manner reached the hive. He then set fire to some dried grass and tinder which he shoved into the cavity and quickly descended. After a while he went up again, carrying my fryingpan, which he filled with delicious comb, and again descended literally covered with the bees, who, returning home honey-laden found him robbing their store. The stings planted in his body seemed to cause him little annoyance, for he picked them out with as much *sang froid* as a hedger in England would extract a bramble thorn. The time employed to gather this honey did not exceed half an hour, so that we were soon again *en route* for our camping place on a bare grassy island in the centre of the Camlang-panee, a branch of the Tenga-panee, which was reached about four in the afternoon, after a march of twenty or twenty-five miles.

Chowsam's tame herd of cow buffaloes were grazing in the neighbourhood, and his herdsman had erected a sort of stage of bamboos, roughly thatched with grass; in this rickety place we stowed our baggage and made up beds for the night, and then while the evening meal of

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boiled rice and roasted dry fish was preparing, we took a refreshing bath in the river, here about knee deep and easily fordable. While thus engaged some of the buffaloes grazing in the forest which lined the river bank, hearing voices, crossed the river to the island, a proceeding on their part which caused us little apprehension until, startled by an angry snorting, we descried a wild bull which had joined the herd pawing up the earth on the opposite bank, evidently angry at our familiarity with his harem of tame cows. This sight was a signal which drove every man to the shanty on the island, where, in the meanwhile, the herdsman had arrived and was busy entertaining our camp with the history of the terrible bull. It appeared that on the previous day the herd of cows, under the protection of a fine tame bull and the herdsman, were grazing in the vicinity of a neighbouring jheel, when the stranger, which had apparently been driven from a wild herd, as he had several wounds about him, rushed out of the jungle; having attacked and speedily killed the tame bull he then constituted himself protector of the tame herd. On the morning of the day of our arrival he had driven off a tiger which had attacked a young buffalo, and was now so savage that the herd had kept out of his way all day.

Chowsam asked me to shoot the giant, as I had a double rifle with me, but I declined at first, as I had no confidence in my nerve, which had suffered during the constant attacks of fever. The refusal made Chowsam laugh, as if doubtful of my courage. Somewhat nettled, I took up the rifle intending to have a shot, but as both

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the Chief and Philip added their entreaties that I would not attempt it, I desisted, though, however, not at all pleased with the Chief's manner.

Before leaving the Camlang-panee next morning, I promised the herdsman thirty rupees for the head of the wild bull, and it was afterwards killed by some Mishmees with poisoned arrows. The horns, which were very fine, measuring eleven feet two inches from tip to tip, measured round the inside and across the forehead, are now in the possession of my friend Mr. Wood, of the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce.

Two days' short marches from the Camlang river, through dense jungle, brought us on to the right bank of the Bramapootra, a few miles below the Bramakund, and we camped* for the evening on a sandbank near the mouth of a nullah opening from the Bramapootra. Although within a stone's throw of the river, we were completely shut in by dense forest. The dry sandy bed of the nullah, along which we had travelled for several miles, was everywhere cut up with the tracks of buffaloes, deer, elephants, tigers, and bears, which aroused a hope of getting a shot at a deer during the night, food now being scarce, and our expectation of a supply of fish from Mishmee parties having been disappointed. The evening meal consisted of two small dried fish procured from a party of Mishmees, rice, and boiled plantain flower. There are few more delicious vegetables—if one may apply the name to it—than the plantain flower when cooked, and skill is required to acquire perfection in

* Illustration.

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the art. The flower, which is generally about the size of a good cucumber, should be stripped of its outside green leaves, and nothing used but the inner tender leaves and stalk; these, after being carefully washed, are put into a pot containing cold water, seasoned with salt, and boiled for half an hour, when they become tender and very glutinous. Care should be taken not to boil them too long, or they become tough.

After supper I proposed to Chowsam that we should try and get a shot during the night to replenish our larder, rice and vegetables, which we had lived on for two days, being but sorry food for men doing hard work. He, however, objected to move, and suggested that I should go up the nullah towards midnight, when I would get a shot without the trouble of lying in wait. This proposition bore on the face of it such evident sarcasm, that I perceived Chowsam wished to 'try the Sahib's' courage, discredited by the affair of the buffalo. To ascend the nullah late at night, when bears and tigers were sure to be on the move, would be a most foolhardy business, but I felt that it would not do to allow Chowsam or any of his men to indulge in any fancied superiority, so I determined to ascend the nullah and take the chance of getting a shot at anything on the move.

After sitting at the camp fire with Chowsam until towards midnight, I shouldered my rifle and proposed that Chowsam should accompany me up the nullah. The Chief objected, however, on account of the lateness of the hour, but facetiously observed that there was no

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reason why I should not go, whereupon I left the camp, desiring two of the men to follow.

A description of the nullah will give a definite idea of what I was about to do. A nullah is the dry bed of a water-course, which in summer carries off the waters of the plains into the rivers, and in winter becomes dry, with the exception of pools left here and there, to which the beasts of the forests resort for water at night. The banks are generally perpendicular, and from twelve to twenty feet high, so that it is not easy to get out unless by the beaten paths used by a herd of wild elephants or buffaloes. It must be confessed that I did not relish the prospect before me, but unless Chowsam was convinced that the Sahib was not to be trifled with, I should lose all influence over him and his followers. So I entered the mouth of the watercourse. The lofty trees—whose partly exposed roots hung in hideous distortions over the sides of the nullah — formed overhead a dense canopy, causing a darkness which at first seemed impenetrable, but after groping along for a time the eye grew accustomed to it, while the white sandy bed defined the road, the trunks of fallen trees standing out on it like uncouth monsters. With rifle cocked, and closely followed by the two Khamtees, I went cautiously on, stopping every now and then to listen to the sounds of cracking twigs which denoted the movements of some animal. Proceeding in this way for nearly a mile, I came to a fallen tree which laid across the nullah. Upon this I at once determined to seat myself and wait for a shot at any passing game. The tree was admirably

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adapted for a Machan: climbing into it, I succeeded in finding a comfortable perch, about fifteen feet from the ground, as it were on a bridge, underneath which any animal coming up or down the nullah would have to pass. A slight opening in the trees on either bank allowed an occasional moonbeam to fall upon the bed of the nullah, thus giving light to take aim.

Having made myself comfortable, I bade the men return to camp, and remained alone on the watch. An hour passed without the sign of game, and I began to fear lest the moon should leave me in darkness, when the glare of a torch suddenly revealed some one ascending the nullah, and to my surprise I saw Chowsam and several of his men, evidently alarmed for my safety. They stopped just under the tree, and commenced an earnest conversation—the men evidently in doubt as to the spot where they had left me—which was suddenly interrupted by my descent into the middle of the group, upsetting two of the men. They picked themselves up and fled, but Chowsam's sharp unpleasant knife was out in a moment, but put up again as I greeted him with a loud laugh. We now formed a fine picture, as the glare of the torch lighted up the nullah. The working of the Khamtees' countenances as they composed their features for a laugh amused me greatly, as it was evident that they had been thoroughly frightened. Chowsam felt that he had been sold, but he appeared more pleased than angry, and proposed to keep watch with me for a time. As the moon had now disappeared, a torch and company were welcome, seeing that I

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intended to wait on the chance of getting a shot at daybreak. After smoking and chatting for some time, Chowsam and his men departed, having first enveloped me in several of their blankets, and I stretched myself on the limb of the tree and waited, half-dozing, until the jungle cocks gave warning of the approach of day. Throwing off the blankets and rolling them up into a cushion, I made a comfortable seat, and with rifle in readiness commenced another watch. An hour passed, and daylight had already penetrated into the nullah, when I caught the cry of a little barking deer, which was evidently on the move. It soon made its appearance and stopped within a few yards of the tree, apparently unconscious of danger. Poor little animal! I covered it with my rifle, and with a pang of regret pulled the trigger. When the smoke cleared away all regret vanished, as in its outstretched form I realized the prospect of a venison breakfast. The report of the rifle echoed far and wide, and was answered by the mournful screams of the hulluk monkeys. The whole forest seeming suddenly to have awakened into life, I was in no hurry to descend from the tree, and it was fortunate that I stopped to reload, for I had scarcely reloaded when a tremendous crash was heard in the nullah just above, and a solitary bull-buffalo charged right under the tree in the direction of the camp. A bullet struck him in the side, without staying his career for a moment.

Fearing now that others might follow in his footsteps, or that the camp fires and the shouts of the men in the camp might drive him up the nullah again, I remained

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in the tree for half an hour, when Chowsam and all our party, including Philip and the negro, came in sight. The chief seeing me safe and sound, shook his head and laconically observed that it was "very bad," but I pointed to the venison, which was soon on the shoulders of one of the men, and we all returned to camp.

It appeared that Chowsam had been alarmed, lest I had been hurt by the buffalo. The beast, evidently infuriated, had charged through the camp and taken to the river, followed for some distance by the two bull-dogs, which broke loose and gave chase.

This night's work had completely restored Chowsam's good opinion of my courage, and he never again ventured to put it to the test without necessity.

The loss of sleep over-night rendered the continuance of our march next morning rather a hard proceeding, but the scarcity of provisions would not allow of a day's rest, so we continued on, after a hearty breakfast of venison, which did not leave enough of the deer to make a decent meal in the evening. The men toiling all day under their loads, ate such enormous quantities of rice that our supply was rapidly decreasing, and I foresaw it was plain that, unless we soon arrived at a Mishmee village, we should experience a little hunger. In the evening when we camped, at the Bramapootra, some of the men collected a number of edible beetles. These little insects, which are a species of water-beetle, are found in immense numbers during the cold weather in the dry shingly bed of the Upper Bramapootra. They are about the size of a finger-nail, with bronzed wing shields, and

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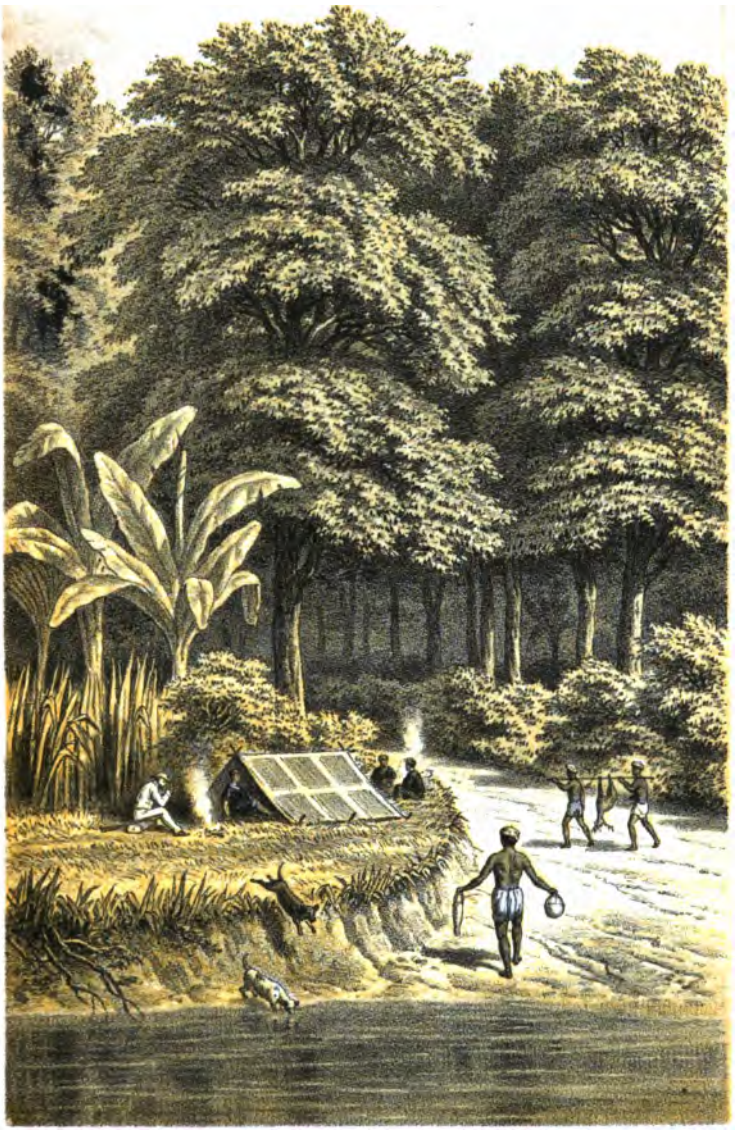

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OUR CAMP ON THE BRAMAHPOOTRA.

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when handled exude a liquid resembling walnut juice, of a strong but not unpleasant odour. The Khamtees seemed to consider them a great delicacy when boiled, and for several days the odour of the beetles seemed to impregnate their bodies, to their intense satisfaction. Fortunately we had encountered a party of Degaroo Mishmees on a fishing expedition to the plains, and succeeded in getting a few dried fish from them; and these, with the remainder of the venison, afforded the last good meal we were to have for some time.

We had now arrived at the famous Bramakund, and I was greatly disappointed to find that my expectations—gathered from hearsay—of its scenic grandeur were not realized. I had pictured a gloomy gorge, from which I expected to see the Bramapootra pouring its waters into a large pool or lake. Instead of this, the Bramapootra river simply debouched from a low range of hills in a noisy turbulent stream, and turning sharp from the north flowed quietly eastwards. Its rocky banks were not two hundred feet in the perpendicular anywhere. The Bramakund or sacred spring—from which the neighbourhood takes its name—was nothing more than a tiny streamlet trickling down the precipitous cliff, and falling into a deep basin, formed by a point of rock, jutting out at right angles from the left bank of the river. In the basin were great numbers of large fish, which are fed by the Hindoo fakeers, who guard the sacred spring. Pilgrims from all parts of Assam and Bengal visit the Bramakund to bathe in its sacred waters, during the cold season, and every pilgrim so visiting the place feeds the

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fish, which are held to be sacred, the Mishmees declaring that they are the spirits of departed fakeers.

After I had visited the spring, and seen all there was to be seen, I returned to my tent, which was pitched under the lee of a gigantic granite boulder. In the meantime I found a party of Degaroo Mishmees had arrived, the leader of whom had brought a message to Chowsam from Bowsong, the most powerful chief of the Meju Mishmees, to the effect that he had heard rumours of our intended visit, and desired to intimate that our presence would not be welcome in the Meju country. This was most unexpected, both by Chowsam and myself, who on conferring together decided to treat the message with polite indifference. After a little parley with the Mishmees, in which we conveyed our belief that Bowsong must have made a mistake, we gave his messengers some opium, and they joined our party, making merry until a late hour at night.

There are three tribes of Mishmees, known respectively as the Degaroo, Meju, and Chullah Cottah, or Crophaired Mishmees, so called from the habit of cropping their hair round the head so as to give them the appearance of wearing a mushroom-shaped hat. This tribe inhabits the hill country directly north of Sudiya, and extending to the frontiers of Thibet. They are exceedingly warlike and predatory, annually carrying fire and sword into the country of their neighbours, the Degaroo and Meju Mishmees, by whom they are both feared and detested—at one time they were such a trouble to the Indian Government that they were

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forbidden to visit Sudiya or the plains, on pain of death. This stringent regulation has, however, been removed at the request of a deputation of the chiefs, who visited Sudiya and guaranteed the good behaviour of the tribe, if allowed to trade with the plains. For a year they have come down from the hills without indulging in any of their old propensities. When I was in Northern Assam, little was known of this tribe beyond the visits paid by a few traders to the annual fair at Sudiya. With Thibet they carry on a considerable traffic, exchanging Mishmee teta, a kind of febrifuge, and musk, for yaks, knives, spear-heads, iron cooking vessels, beads, and brass pipes of Chinese manufacture.

The Degaroos dwell south of the Chullah Cottahs, between the little river Khoondil and the line of the Bramapootra river. In dress, manners and customs, and appearance they are the same as the Mejus, who inhabit the country to the north-east of them, but their language is distinct from that of the latter, with whom they intermarry.

They are of small stature, few of the men exceeding five feet six; sturdy in physique, with unmistakeable Mongolian features, and light copper-coloured complexions.

Their dress merely consists of a sack-like garment, reaching from the neck to the bend of the knee, and made of a piece of cotton, or yak haircloth, doubled lengthwise, and sewn together down one side, with holes cut for the neck and arms. The garment, worn open down the front, forms the scantiest cover for their

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body and limbs, while, from a piece of hide or cord round the waist, an apron-like piece of cloth hangs down to the knee. Over this they wear a sporran, made of either bear or monkey skin, which serves as a pocket for flint and steel, &c. The hair is worn long, and twisted into a knot, secured on the top of the head by a wooden pin. The chiefs wear large fur caps, made of the skin of a little animal somewhat resembling a fox, peculiar to the Mishmee hills. As ornaments, the men wear rings of brass on their arms, and large discs of bamboo or silver for earrings, which are let into the lobe of the ear, which is split and greatly distended. Their weapons consist of bows and poisoned arrows; a staff, eight feet long, shod with a spear at one end, and a spike at the other, serves the double purpose—the spear for the chase, and the spike for assisting them to climb their rugged mountains.

A small knife, attached to a green hide strap or belt, slung over the shoulder, hangs under the right arm. This belt, in the case of a chief, is ornamented with large brass studs, and shield-shaped pieces of brass, three inches in diameter. The most important weapon of a chief, next to the bow and arrow, is the long, keen-edged Thibetan knife, of which they are exceedingly proud. It is about three feet long, and of uniform width from hilt to point, but in point of usefulness it is far inferior to the Khamtee knife, worn by the majority of the men, and also by the chiefs when they are out on an expedition. A slave generally carries the Thibetan weapon, which is worn on all important occasions. All these

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tribes are expert hunters, killing innumerable bears, mhittons, and wild elephants, besides boars, muskdeer, and Mishmee ta-kin, a large animal peculiar to their hills, somewhat resembling a cross between the deer and bull. There is not a live specimen of this animal in Europe, but several are kept in the palace grounds of the Emperor of Pekin, and a stuffed specimen may be seen at the British Museum. The Mishmees are keen traders in slaves and knives, which they buy from the Thibetans and Khamtees in Burmah, in exchange for musk and teta. They also bring wax and teta to Sudiya to barter for gaudy handkerchiefs, blankets, and burra cupras, a large cloth, some twelve yards long and two broad, made in Lower Assam, of the Reah fibre, which is everlasting in wear.

The women, when young, are pretty. Like the men, they are hardy and active, tripping along under heavy burdens with the ease and graceful gait which belongs only to the true daughters of the mountains. Free and unreserved in their manners to strangers, they are yet modest. Their scanty, but picturesque, dress consists of a cotton jacket, with short sleeves, buttoning over the chest like a waistcoat, and reaching half-way down their waist, and a tight-fitting plaited cotton skirt, leaving the calf bare. Their ornaments are many and peculiar. Round the head they wear a silver band, in the shape of a coronet, broad above the forehead, and tapering off on each side towards the back of the head. In the rims of their ears they wear large rings of silver or brass, two or three inches in diameter, and in the lobe they insert

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large stud-shaped pieces of silver, the size of a penny piece. Round their necks they hang strings of beads, chiefly red and white, and coils of brass wire—the necklaces of the wives of chiefs consisting of beads and wire, sometimes weighing as much as ten or twelve pounds. They also wear rings and bracelets of silver and brass, principally of Chinese manufacture, and procured from the Thibetans.

Such was the dress and appearance of the party of Mishmees who kept our camp alive during a greater part of the night, and into whose country I was about to enter. Their wild ways and picturesque style of costume had already prepossessed me in their favour, and I felt no fear in venturing among them in their mountain strongholds.

One of the men of the party was a Meju Mishmee, and Chowsam secured his services as guide to the Meju country, as the morrow's march would take us from the plains into the dreaded Mishmee hills.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE MISHMEE HILLS.

Difficult Travelling—The Negro Interpreter—Waxed Meal—Short Commons—Mishmee Pork—Kunsong—Mishmee Houses—Heads—The Brama-panee—Rope Bridges—The Landslip—Supply of Fish—Chief Poso—Leech-bites—The Chief's Jester—A Churlish Host—Mishmee Demons.

BEFORE the sun was over the distant Patkoi range we had commenced the ascent of the lower ranges of the Mishmee hills. The easiest route would have been the path which led along the right bank of the Bramapootra, but the Meju guide was ignorant of the country, and Chowsam urged that this route would take us through the district of the clan whose chief, Kysa, had murdered the fathers Crick and Bourie. As this chief had been captured and eventually hanged by the British authorities the clan cherished a blood feud against us, a very sufficient reason for avoiding their country: I was content to choose the less frequented route, hoping by this means to get on to the Thibetan frontiers before the Lamas had time to concert plans for stopping me.

Months spent in climbing the mountainous country of Eastern Thibet had, I thought, inured me to mountain travelling, but the toil of the first day's march in the

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Mishmee hills was almost too much for my strength, weakened by fever. At times our path, which was often scarcely discernible, led along the almost perpendicular sides of the hills, which, as we advanced, became veritable mountains. Often we scrambled, monkey-like, along their declivities, holding on by means of tangled roots, which formed a network sufficiently strong to bear our weight; occasionally we crossed deep chasms by means of bamboo scaffolding rudely constructed by the guides and the party of Mishmees who were returning with us, and in some places long plaited bamboo ropes, let down over horrible precipices, afforded the only means of descent to the valleys below.

On halting for our mid-day meal of cold rice the negro was found to be missing, and I feared that he had deserted; but in half an hour or so he tottered up between two Mishmees, and throwing himself down before the fire, declared, in an agonised voice, that he could proceed no farther. The fellow's eyes were starting out of his head; the whites, in contrast with his ebony skin, gave him a frightful appearance; his swollen tongue hung from between his thick parched lips, discoloured by the marks of dried saliva, while he shivered as with an ague. Chowsam shook his head on seeing him, and I was quite puzzled to account for his state. Suddenly, however, I remembered that, from the time of our leaving Sudiya until the day after we left Chowsam's village, the fellow had been continually drunk, and hard work, together with the want of stimulants, had reduced him to his present condition. I opened one of my bottles of port and

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administered a tumblerful, into which I put fifteen drops of chlorodyne. The effect of this was ludicrous ; the poor wretch laughed and cried alternately, and then, gradually recovered his strength, sat up and smoked a pipe, and in an hour was enabled to continue the march. I foresaw from this little incident that the negro must have something to replace his grog or he would speedily succumb, and I afterwards hit upon an ingenious plan of supplying his wants without calling again on my cellar.

Towards sundown we reached the first Degaroo Mishmee house, utterly exhausted. The brave little Philip, though he was quite done up, asked, as usual, what he should get me to eat—he never once during the two years that he was with me neglected to make this enquiry at the end of a day's march—but, too tired to eat, I rolled myself up in a blanket and in a few minutes was fast asleep. Somewhere about midnight Chowsam wakened me, as the negro was ill and unable to sleep, so I put in force the plan I had determined upon for supplying his want of stimulant by giving him twenty drops of chlorodyne in about a teaspoonful of water, which had the effect of sending him off to sleep before I had finished the pipe with which I solaced myself in the absence of food.

In the morning our Mishmee hosts brought us some most unpalatable meal, made from the seed of the sago palm, mixed with bees' wax. We were all too exhausted to attempt marching that day, so resolved to halt where we were for the day, in spite of the prospect of scanty

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fare. This seemed somewhat to disturb the equanimity of our hosts, who declared that beyond a young pig, three fowls, and a little of the waxed meal, they had no provisions, as all their summer supply had been consumed, and their young men had not returned from the plains with a fresh supply of fish and dried deer flesh.

The Mishmees who had followed us from the Bramapootra had continued on their journey the evening previous, being hard pressed for provisions. Thus it was a case of hunger for a few days, until we reached a gam's or chieftain's village, unless our hosts could be persuaded to sell their pig, which eventually became ours, and our party had a scanty meal of pork, which, however, neither Philip nor myself could touch after witnessing the slaughter of poor piggy and the Mishmee style of cookery.

The unfortunate animal was done to death by repeated thrusts from a spear; it was then disembowelled and thrown on a fire kindled outside, and scorched until it swelled, after which it was scraped down with a knife, cut up into quarters and boiled, all bloody and filthy as it was, for about twenty minutes; but the Khamtees devoured it without salt, and only regretted that there was no more.

The house where we were now quartered belonged to Kunsong, head of the Brama clan, who claims the lordship of the soil at the Bramakund. At one time the chief of this clan collected tolls from all the fakeers visiting the sacred spring, but since the British took

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possession of Northern Assam this privilege has ceased. The clan seems to have suffered from decay, all their slaves having decamped and taken refuge in the plains, about the Bramakund, where British rule protects them. This, more than anything has ruined the Brama clan, and the chief families are now very poor, while they blame the English for their misfortune. Under these circumstances my visit was not so pleasing as it might otherwise have been.

The interiors of the Mishmee houses more resemble cowsheds than human habitations, while from the outside they might be mistaken for fowl-houses. They are built on bamboo piles, the floor being raised, while the roof of dry grass projects in long eaves reaching down to the level of the floor, and hiding the walls which, with the floor, are some six feet from the ground, and made of bamboo wicker-work, and admit a strong current of air. They are about twelve feet wide, while the length varies according to circumstances, generally regulated by the number of wives of the owner, each of which has a separate stall or room for herself, so that in the case of a rich chief the houses are often forty yards long. The door, about five feet high, situated at the end, is reached by means of a balk of timber, with notches cut in it. On entering, a long passage presents itself, from which the rooms open just as stalls in a stable. The first, or the strangers' room, has in it a moveable stove, such as are found in the Khamtee houses. The most striking feature of the interior is the number of skulls of mhittons, bullocks, buffaloes, bears, tigers, deer, monkeys, and

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takins. In the house of a powerful chief several hundreds of skulls are hung up along the walls of the passage, and his wealth is always calculated according to the number of these trophies, which also form a kind of currency among the tribes, slaves and knives being purchased for so many heads each. The word head as expressed in the Mishmee tongue, also means anything which is given in exchange; for instance, if a Mishmee buys a mhitton for two mhitton's heads, one bear's head, one iron pot, and one piece of cloth, each article will be reckoned as a head, so that this term among them has a very wide signification.

During the cold weather they keep small fires in almost every room, so that the houses, being low, are constantly filled with smoke, and many old people suffer from smoke blindness, which causes the eyes to recede and a mucous substance to form under the lids as in cases of ophthalmia, from which it differs, however, in being apparently unattended by pain or inflammation.

At some distance from every house a number of little store-houses are erected, each on four uprights, and from the number of these buildings one may count the wives possessed by the owner of the house. Each wife has a store-house of her own, in which she stores all the grain and other produce she is able to raise by her own industry. Each wife tries to outdo the others in the quantity and quality of the stores in her pantry, an invasion of which would be considered so great an offence that the Mishmees say it could not happen.

Mhittons, pigs, and fowls form the principal live-stock

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in the Mishmee country, but only the chief possesses these riches, which even with them are scarce. Nearly every house swarms with rats, which live in the skulls ornamenting the walls, and one or more cats in every house live on these vermin. Dirt and filth abound, and the people never wash, so that their otherwise fair complexion is generally begrimed with soot, through which, in the case of old people, each wrinkle is plainly visible, giving a most grotesque appearance to their faces, as though painted with white lines.

During my first day's sojourn among the Mishmees I was sorely troubled with vermin, with which their houses swarmed, and from that time forth I was a victim to the most unpleasant of hardships which a traveller has to encounter in his sojourn among wild tribes.

Leaving Kunsong's, two days' scrambling through a very rough mountain country brought us to the bank of a small stream falling into the Bramapootra from its left bank, and called by the natives of Assam the Brama-panee or sacred stream. Here we camped, entirely exhausted, after two days of almost total abstinence from food, with the exception of two or three mouthfuls of rice for each man, and rations were served out of about a teacupful of rice apiece, while two small fish, which we found in a Mishmee trap in the river, stewed with yam leaves, served as a relish, each having a mouthful mixed with his rice. After this scanty meal we had about half a pound of rice to stave off the pangs of hunger in the morning; but as the house of a chief was only six miles distant we all kept up our spirits with the

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thought that on the morrow food would be plentiful. In the morning a party of Mishmees from the opposite bank of the Bramapootra arrived on their way to the plains, having crossed the river by means of a rope bridge just above us.

These bridges are used everywhere in Thibet for crossing the mountain rivers where the banks are precipitous, and it is probable that the Mishmees have thence borrowed the idea. The contrivance is very simple. A long rope of plaited bamboos is stretched from bank to bank, each end secured to a tree or post. The person desiring to cross ascends a small platform and secures himself in a sling of raw hide made fast to a sort of skid of hard wood, and then, lifting his feet off the platform, he shoots with the rapidity of an arrow down the incline of the rope. Having reached the centre he hauls himself up the opposite incline by his hands. It is not a pleasant way of crossing a raging torrent probably a couple of hundred feet below one, but use soon accustoms a person to cross without difficulty.

Just as we were setting out we were startled by a terrific report from the direction of the mountain up stream. The earth shook as in an earthquake, and I concluded that we were going to have one such as had caused frightful damage in Cachar in Lower Assam the previous year, and I stood with bent head, fully expecting some fearful catastrophe. As the report died away in rumbling echoes, Philip had caught my hand and stood like a statue, while Chowsam and his men, arrested in all atti-

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tudes, stood gazing at each other in utter bewilderment. It was a trying time, but as nothing followed the report and shaking of the earth, we drew a long breath of relief. Chowsam was the first to regain his wits and understand what had taken place, so he sent off two of the Mishmees who had joined the camp early in the morning to reconnoitre, and in a quarter of an hour they rushed up to us in a great fright, telling Chowsam that the devil residing in the neighbouring mountain had been angry, and rent the side of the mountain. The fellows gave us such an account of what had taken place that the chief, with myself and Philip, started off to see for ourselves; and, sure enough, at a spot about half a mile distant, where the stream forced its way through the mountain, forming a gorge twenty yards wide, the mountain side towering like a wall some two hundred feet high, a mass of the mountain, as big as one of our modern terminus hotels, had slipped and blocked up the gorge, causing the river below the improvised dam to fall visibly. By the time we reached camp the stream had again risen, and we were puzzled to account for the joyous shouts of our men, but on coming up we found them busily engaged in cleaning fish, numbers of which had got into the trap close by, as the muddy water caused by the landslip came down stream and drove the fish before it.

To men who had been pinched by hunger for several days, this unexpected addition to our larder was indeed a treat. A good meal of fish stewed with yam leaves sent us on our way rejoicing, utterly forgetful of our late

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sufferings, leaving a party of Mishmees who owned the weirs to reap a rich harvest.

In the winter months, when the mountain streams become very low, the fish descend to the Bramapootra, where they feed, commencing to run down in November. As soon as the Mishmees see the fish on the move, they select a narrow part of the stream at the foot of a rapid, and run out from each bank a barrier of bamboo wicker work, sufficiently open for the water to pass through, but close enough to prevent the fish escaping. In the centre a gap about two feet is left open, through which the fish pass with a rush, and are caught in a kind of bamboo sieve, somewhat resembling the oblong sieve used by masons for sifting sand. By this means great quantities of fish are taken by the Mishmees, who smoke them over fires until they are quite hard, so that they can be ground to powder, in which state they will keep for months. As no salt is used in preserving them they are very flavourless.

I never saw more than one kind of fish in the Mishmee hill streams, and they resemble a herring in shape and size, but with a small mouth like the carp, which in opening protrudes like a snout. It is difficult to catch them with bait as they are extremely shy, but by means of a very small hook baited with a peculiar kind of tender moss known to the Mishmees, good sport may be had.

From the Brama-panee a short march of six hours brought us to the house of Chief Poso, head of the Yoen clan. By this time I was gradually growing lame from

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the effect of leech-bites about the ankles. I had been compelled to sleep without undressing while camping out in the open air, and the red leeches had got at me. One morning I found my boots literally full of blood and the crushed bodies of several red leeches, and the bites of these venomous little creatures were beginning to fester, causing great pain.

Although we took up our quarters in Poso's house about mid-day, the chief never appeared until nine in the evening, by which time we were all very hungry. After making his appearance he was decidedly anything but pleased at our presence, and grudgingly gave us some meal called pobossa by the Assamese, full of sand and very unpalatable. However, I swallowed a mouthful or two, and in spite of my anxiety at the evident unfriendliness of the chief, rolled myself up in a blanket and fell asleep near the fire, Chowsam on one side of me and Philip on the other, but not before Chowsam had warned us not to undress or lay aside our arms, consisting of a long knife and a revolver each.

When I awoke the following morning I found Chowsam and the negro at high words and both very cross, but from neither could I learn the cause. The Mishmee chief Poso, however, was quite another individual; he greeted me with a loud I—yaw, and pointing to his mouth with one hand, rubbed his stomach with the other, which I rightly interpreted to indicate the prospect of food. A mess of pork was shortly served up by some of his wives, and somewhat smoothed the ruffled temper of the Khamtees. Philip and myself managed to make a

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scanty breakfast off a small chicken, which he had succeeded in getting from one of our host's better halves.

The chief was determined that we should stay a day with him, but Chowsam at first haughtily declined his hospitality. Poso, however, at last succeeded in smoothing the Khamtee's anger. After our mid-day meal, which had been washed down with plentiful libations of a fermented liquor made from rice, Poso sent for one of his slaves to amuse us, describing him as a man possessed with a devil. When the poor wretch made his appearance I saw that he was half-witted. He was scantily dressed, and wore with an air of great pride a long wooden sword and a head-dress of feathers. When he had taken a seat round the fire, Poso's eight wives came in and formed an outer circle round us; then the jester—for such he really was—commenced his amusing pranks. He imitated with marvellous correctness different sounds of a farm-yard. He then related obscene stories, accompanied with gestures that caused the women to run away screaming, only however to return when Poso called him to order. His great effect of all was yet to come. Having asked permission to take a seat beside me, he closely examined everything about my body, making observations which convulsed everybody with laughter: even the stoical Chowsam went into fits, while I could not repress a smile at the curious expression on his countenance. The fellow was a wit, and Chowsam informed me that he was the cleverest jester in the Mishmee country, though a somewhat expensive luxury for his master, as he was a dreadful scamp. The possession of such a jester is not common

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amongst the Mishmees, but I saw several of these half-witted creatures who, being slaves, were kept merely for the sake of amusement.

At night Poso and Chowsam had a long conversation, not of the most friendly nature, for Poso was very extortionate in his demands for presents, and Chowsam's behaviour during the day had irritated our host.

The truth was, when we arrived, Poso had sent Chowsam a message to the effect that he would not entertain us, and the Khamtee chief, to whom Poso was a tributary, was wroth with him, and now refused to give him a single present beyond the payment for our board and lodging.

When Poso found this, he told Chowsam that I should not proceed farther through the Mishmee country, saying that the presiding demons of the mountains were angry at my presence, and had already shown their anger by trying to cast down a portion of the mountain upon me at the Brama-panee. This was an allusion to the landslip; so I replied that the spirit who took care of me was much stronger than those in the Mishmee country, and it had cast down the mountain in order to make the river muddy so that I might catch some fish to appease my hunger. This argument seemed too much for mine host, and he enquired about my demon, as to what he was like, and so forth.

The Mishmees being polytheists, though of the lowest order, it was not difficult to make Poso understand the existence of one Great Spirit above all; in spite of having to interpret through the negro and Chowsam,

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our theological discussion lasted far into the night, and the remarks of the Mishmee chief on us may be recorded as illustrative of the dark superstition which prevails among these tribes. On hearing that in my country there was a Good Spirit who ruled all the demons, Poso observed, 'Ah! you English people must be very happy in having such a good and powerful demon in your country. The Mishmees are very unfortunate—we are everywhere surrounded by demons; they live in the rivers, mountains, and trees; they walk about in the dark and live in the winds; we are constantly suffering from them.' Having said so much he stopped and appeared confused, and it was some time before he renewed the conversation. In answer to a question as to which demon he thought the strongest, after some hesitation he said that the demon of fire was the strongest and most dangerous, as he dried up the water and burnt the mountains; he was also good-natured, as he warmed them and cooked their food, a virtue which seemed to have struck him for the first time, as he remarked with an emphatic grunt that 'this was good.' Mine host was philosophising, so I described monotheism to him, and it seemed to create a very pleasing impression. Of course I did not speak to him of the Saviour, as I feared that the Christian religion with its wonderful mystery might be too much for the half-fetishist and half-polytheistic savage to understand, besides which, I saw that Poso was beginning to be excessively uncomfortable, and Chowsam told me not to talk about demons, as the Mishmees disliked it, and

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begged of me for the future to abstain from this subject.

My conversation with Poso, however, served to call up some reflections when I had rolled myself up in a blanket for the night. Here I was among a people who knew nothing of a God, their lives spent amidst a slavish fear of unseen evil spirits, and yet ready in the slow progress of their thoughts to offer up allegiance to one Great Spirit, of whom they might now be said to have heard for the first time. Their poor reasons were incapable of conceiving a notion of anything great and good. Alas! it was a sorry picture, and I almost wished that I was a missionary that I might teach them to become worshippers of one God instead of many, for it was evident that as polytheists they were ripe for receiving monotheism. If our young unmarried Protestant missionaries would, instead of wasting their efforts on the more educated and philosophical people of China, Burmah, and India, go unostentatiously amongst the polytheistic tribes bordering our Indian frontiers and make the country of these people the field of their labours, entering fully into their spirit and mental condition, they would meet with a success and do a work worthy of disciples of the great teacher Christ.

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CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTMAS WITH THE MEJUS.

A Dangerous Reckoning—The Negro Disarmed—Ill Feeling—Fever—Chief Discouraged—Pushing On—My Bearers—Khamtee Kindness—Kaysong — A Welcome Pig — Mishmee Improvidence — Mode of Living—Hospitable Host—The Mysterious Guest—An Unwelcome Message—A Deep Plot—Larkong—A Christmas Feast.

OUR leave-taking with Poso was not over friendly. Chowsam had adhered to his determination of not paying the Mishmee more than a fair price for the provisions furnished us. Consequently we were followed to the outside of the house by Poso and his numerous wives, jeering most insultingly, while the men of the house stood by laughing. This was too much for my hot-blooded Khamtees: they threw down their loads and drawing their knives, ranged themselves alongside of their chief, begging to be allowed to cut up the Mishmee dogs. Chowsam, however, restrained them until Poso brandished his knife, when I saw a sparkle in his eye that warned me to interfere. I stepped between the irate chiefs, and presenting my revolver at the head of Poso, signed to him to stand back, an order that was instantly and respectfully obeyed. Then signing to the Khamtees to take up their baggage, I begged Chowsam

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to put away his knife, which he did, with a loud laugh of defiance at Poso; then turning on his heel he followed his men, Philip and myself bringing up the rear. In justice to the old chief Poso I must say that he treated me well, considering that he owes his ruin to the British authorities. All his slaves have taken refuge in the plains about the Bramakund, and are living under our protection as freemen, which he thinks is a great wrong, while he, in common with many other chiefs, feels deeply insulted by the fact that their runaway slaves are introduced to the English officials under the title of gam or chief by the native political officers, who are perfectly aware of the condition of these refugees.

This treatment of their slaves is a great insult to the chiefs, whose pride is such that they can bear the loss of their slaves, but not so their elevation to the rank of chiefs, to which proceeding we owe the fact that most of the influential chiefs hold aloof from us and rarely visit Sudiya.

During the critical period the negro quietly decamped, only reappearing some hours afterwards at the midday halt. When Chowsam saw him his passion again broke forth in loud and angry expressions, which had the effect of driving the negro to take shelter behind me. There was evidently something wrong, but for a long time I could not get at the truth, as the negro would not interpret truly, and the more I enquired the angrier Chowsam became. At last I took him aside and mustering with a great effort all my knowledge of Assamese, I discovered that during our first night at

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Poso's the negro had got drunk while I was asleep and abused Chowsam before the Mishmees, after which he had roamed through Poso's house insulting the women, and as he was armed with a revolver he had threatened to shoot Chowsam and the chief for interfering to prevent him. Having heard this story, I applied to Philip, who corroborated it, saying that he had been afraid to tell me, lest I should have been roused to punish the negro, who he feared was a desperate ruffian. This was a pleasant state of affairs, but I acted promptly, calling up the negro, who approached us with a good deal of swagger. I drew my revolver, cocked it, and covering his body, desired him to lay down his knife and revolver; he hesitated for a moment, but seeing that I was in earnest, he unbuckled his weapons and laid them on the ground. I then warned him against such conduct for the future, and bade one of the Khamtees take possession of his weapons. Having thus sat in judgment, we made a frugal meal in silence and continued on to our halting-place for the night.

Such occurrences as these sadly interfere with the harmony of a party placed as we were; and even when we camped for the night everyone maintained a sullen silence. The country thus far was still very mountainous; at times we ascended the sides of steep precipices, and at others crept along the rugged, dry beds of mountain streams—everywhere the signs of water were visible, fissures in the hill sides, and deep ravines, showed the destructive force of the summer rains which fed the mountain streams. The country

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was still covered with vegetation, the hills being clothed with large trees, amongst which the sago palm stood out conspicuous. Occasionally we would push our way through patches of tall elephant grass, from ten to twelve feet high, while the india-rubber tree was everywhere plentiful.

Our camping place this evening was a patch of sand in the dry bed of a mountain stream, just large enough to allow of pitching the blanket-tent. For supper, each man had a small fish stewed with yams and yam leaves —a frugal meal, but wholesome. The day's march had been very tiring, and this, added to the general feeling of depression consequent on the affair with Poso in the morning, rendered the evening anything but sociable; so Philip and myself both turned in at an early period, while Chowsam, whose plumes were still very much ruffled, sat alone by the fire till early in the morning. As for the negro, he disappeared behind my tent, and kept carefully out of Chowsam's sight.

On waking next morning I felt very unwell; one of my ankles was much swollen from a festering leech-bite, while the most excruciating pains in my limbs warned me of an approaching attack of fever. By the time we had finished the day's march, and put up in a Mishmee house, it was at its height. It soon broke, however, and towards midnight I got to sleep. Next morning, feeling somewhat better, we started at an early hour, but had not proceeded five miles before I became delirious. Fortunately we reached another Mishmee house before I was quite insensible, and I laid there two

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days, utterly unconscious of everything that took place. On the night of the second day, when I recovered sufficient consciousness to look round me, I was lying, with my head carefully wrapped in a cold wet cloth, in Philip's lap, while the poor little fellow was crying. Chowsam was also near me, as well as a couple of women, one of whom held a basin of cold water, and the other some chicken broth, which the care of my faithful Philip had provided. I felt dreadfully ill, but was conscious of an intense desire to proceed on the journey lest I might linger on the spot and die.

My party were greatly discouraged. Chowsam had sent off a Mishmee with a letter to Captain Gregory, stating that I was very ill and unable to move. Almost the first thing he said when he saw that I had recovered my senses was, that we must return or I would die. I was too exhausted to reply, but Philip, seeing that the thought annoyed me, loudly protested against such a proceeding, saying, in his Chinese pidgin-English, 'You soon makee all well agin, master, and then we can go see that Thibet country.' These few words from the lips of this brave fellow were more to me than medicine, and after I had drunk some chicken broth I slept well until next morning, when I awoke free from fever, but weak, and unable to stand or walk without assistance.

Our large party had been too much for the larder of our hosts during the two days which we had passed in their house, and there was a dearth of food, so that a move was imperative; but my weak state was against this, and it was necessary to call a committee of ways

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and means. Chowsam proposed that all but two of his men should return, leaving us to follow; Philip proposed, as an amendment, that all but Chowsam, himself and his master should proceed in advance to the next Mishmee house; but Chowsam was afraid to trust his Khamtees alone, and still advised that I should abandon the attempt to proceed farther—a course very far from that I intended to adopt—so I settled the matter by determining to push on. I knew that I was over the fever for a few days, and the weakness which now rendered me almost helpless was not dangerous; so when all was ready for a start I asked Chowsam to get a couple of light bamboos, which were tied together after the manner of sedan-chair poles, and resting the ends of the bamboos on the shoulders of two of our shortest men I put my arms over the poles, crutch fashion, and thus half carried I set out once more on my journey. Some of my readers may think that I was a little rash in pushing on in such a state, but there was as yet little danger to be apprehended from the fever, and I knew that as soon as we reached the high table lands of Thibet it would leave me; but for this hope I never could have dragged myself onwards.

Fortunately the country was now less rugged, and our path easier to travel, and the five or six miles before us to the next Mishmee house were accomplished in as many hours. The kind gentleness of Chowsam and his men as they assisted me along was most gratifying, for I had really to be carried, as, added to the weakness left by the fever, my poisoned and festering ankle ren-

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dered one leg almost useless. Every time I stopped—which was necessary at intervals of a hundred yards or so—I was carefully laid down, with my head on some brawny leg bent gently to receive its helpless burden. The ever-ready Philip, whose face was now sadly pinched by hunger, exposure, and anxiety, soothed me by talking of Thibet, knowing from a kindly instinct that the thought of failure weighed heavier upon the mind of his master than fear of the sickness which had rendered him such a helpless object.

Thus by easy stages we reached another house belonging to a Meju Mishmee chief named Kaysong, head of the Ngantong clan, and brother-in-law of the great Meju chief Bowsong, head of the Prun clan. It was a great relief once more to be laid on my back, and a few drops of chlorodyne acting as a soothing stimulant soon sent me to sleep, and I awoke in the morning quite hungry, and able to limp alone.

Kaysong happened to have a full-grown pig, which was too old to breed from, so for a few beads and an ounce or two of opium the delicious morsel became ours, and my party had the pleasure of a good feast, Philip carefully grilling a chop on the embers for me. The cheer at our present quarters decided Chowsam on making a halt for the day, which we spent as the happiest one so far since we had entered the Mishmee hills.

Previous to starting on our journey through the Mishmee hills Chowsam had warned me that we should suffer from scarcity of food, but I had scarcely expected

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to find the Mishmees living such a hand-to-mouth existence, while the dense jungle clothing the precipitous sides of the hills in the lower or Degaroo country renders it impossible to provide food with the rifle or crossbow.

During the summer the Mishmees appear to live on the store of food gathered during the cold weather, consisting of dried fish, and various kinds of grain, such as hill rice pobossa (*elentine caracana*), Indian corn, and one or two others. A kind of flour made from the sago palm (*Caryota urens*), forms a considerable item in their stock, but such is the idleness of the people that they are often reduced to great straits for want of food towards the end of the summer. Cultivation among them is little understood and less cared for, except in the case of opium; and more attention is bestowed on the production of this baneful drug than anything else; while tobacco, which they consume to excess, seems to grow plentifully without having much care bestowed upon it. I found, in many cases, that where food was scarce tobacco was plentiful; indeed the pipe is scarcely ever out of their mouths; from the youngest toddling children up to the oldest men and women, all smoke small pipes, the bowls of which are made from a kind of very hard bamboo, and fitted with reed stems. Occasionally some thrifty Mishmee wife scratches up a little ground, and raises a small crop of very inferior cotton.

The women and slaves do all the cultivation, using a kind of wooden hoe for all purposes of tillage; hence, as can be imagined, all the crops are scanty.

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Wild honey is gathered in great quantities, and wax, which they take down to the plains, forms a great article of barter. The only supply of food which the Mishmees take with them, on these trading visits to the plains, is the waxed meal already spoken of, but the plains being their great hunting-grounds, they revel in the flesh of deer, bears, and elephants, during the few months of dry weather spent there.

During the wet summer months they live pretty well, and a stay in their country then would not entail much inconvenience in respect of food, but as the cold dry weather approaches, the Mishmees, unable to get to the plains, suffer considerably.

We found our host Kaysong very hospitable: he was a Meju Mishmee, and like all his tribe, had benefited by yearly visits in his youth to the Thibetan frontier town of Roemah. There he exchanged his teta and other medicines with the Chinese traders for articles of Chinese manufacture, such as iron pans, brass-headed pipes, beads, &c.

The day's rest greatly benefited me, and poultices of pobossa meal gave my ankle great relief; indeed towards night all our party felt in high spirits. Kaysong's cellar produced an unlimited supply of fermented rice liquor, and before the family retired to rest Kaysong, Chowsam, and another silent Mishmee, Philip and myself, with the negro, as interpreter, formed a pleasant party round the fire.

There was no lack of conversation, and it appeared to me that Kaysong had an object in keeping it up: when I

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once or twice grew tired and sleepy, he called for liquor, and made his women attend upon us with a sprightliness that effectually roused me. In this manner we spent several hours, and at last, when the house was wrapped in sleep, the chief, Kaysong, mysteriously arose, lighted a torch, and went round his house to satisfy himself that there were no listeners; he then returned to his seat, and introduced his silent Mishmee guest as a confidential messenger from Bowsong, the great Meju chief. The sight of this individual had already filled me with apprehension, and on his turning out to be a secret messenger, I felt that his presence boded no good. On a signal from Kaysong he delivered his message, that we had better not come on, as Bowsong and the other Mishmee chiefs had been bound under a promise, extorted from them by the Chinese official at Roemah, to obstruct my passage through the Meju country. Since Chowsam's visit to Roemah, the year before, the Thibetan officials at that town, who had received the Khamtee with great friendliness, had been dismissed and replaced by a Chinese Rajah, and all the Thibetan people who befriended Chowsam had been beaten and imprisoned by his order. Bowsong, as a tributary of the Thibetans, could not help himself; so he begged his old friend Chowsam not to bring the stranger into his country, as the Chinese Rajah had ordered some Mejus to take a message to me, with a dog and a knife, and the letters which Chowsam had left at Roemah, to be forwarded to the French missionaries at Bathang. This oration was delivered in a loud tone of voice, as though

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intended for every one to hear. In reply to it I simply said that I would continue on my journey, unless stopped by force, and no further remark was made until after Kaysong had once more paid a visit to the inner rooms of his house, and examined by torchlight the sleepers in our room. The messenger then drawing close up to Chow-sam and myself, continued speaking in whispers, a proceeding which, combined with the mysterious behaviour of our host, greatly surprised me; however I was not kept long in suspense, and I learnt that the large population of the Thibetan district of Roemah was ready to pay their revenue to the Queen, if she would only send some Sepoys to protect them against the Lamas, but as they were at present entirely at the mercy of their priests they dare not help a solitary Sahib—the penalty was too great. Had I not been in Eastern Thibet, and known that when the brave French missionaries first settled in Banga in 1867, village after village had thrown off the yoke of the Lama priesthood* and become Catholics, I might have doubted the truth of this message. As it was I felt that a deep plot was being laid bare to me.

This was not what I had bargained for; so I replied that the Queen's words were that no more land should be eaten up, and I, as a peaceful traveller, could not interfere in these matters. This reply appeared greatly to astonish the messenger, and Kaysong asked for what reason I had come into their country. Of course I told them that we desired to send our tea into Thibet, and trade

* All the inhabitants of this village with the French priests were afterwards massacred by the Thibetan Lamas.

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with the people. At this they shook their heads, saying, 'Oh, that is no use; all communication and trade with Assam has been forbidden by the Lamas, under the penalty of death; so that, unless you can take the country, you had better return before you get into trouble. The men of Kysa's clan, who cut up the two Europeans, a year or two back, in the Meju country, have been to Roemah and held a long council with the Jarmin,* and as they wish to avenge the death of their chief, your life is forfeited if you venture into the Meju country. It will be difficult for even Bowsong to protect you.'

Knowing that Kysa's clan cherished a blood feud against the English, I fully understood the danger that would surround me on entering Meju territory, but feeling assured that all but Kysa's clan were secretly well disposed, I determined to proceed on, and said as much before I left the council to turn in. Chowsam with Kaysong and the messenger sat talking until daylight, and apparently arranged that I should proceed, for we spent another pleasant day with Kaysong, and proceeded the following morning to the house of Larkong, the last Mishmee house on this side of the great range of mountains visible from Sudiya, which forms the boundary between the Degaroo country at this side, and that of the Mejus beyond. The day following was Christmas-day, and as Larkong, our host, sold us a pig, we spent the day with him and his family, who were exceedingly kind.

In the evening, after a Christmas dinner of pork and

* Thibetan name for the Chinese political resident at Roemah.

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rice, followed by fresh honeycomb, gathered by Larkong's sons, the healths of the Queen and the Mishmee tribes were drunk with honours, in brimming bamboo cups, and the sounds of revelry were heard far into the night.

Next morning we would have continued our journey, but one or two of the Khamtees were *hors de combat* from the effects of their Christmas dinner, so we were compelled to remain another day with Larkong.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE BOUNDARY MOUNTAIN.

Highest Elevation—The Teta Plant—A Grand Prospect—A Cold Night—A Meeting—Envoys from Roemah—Prohibition to Advance—The Dog and Knife—Thibetan Officials on the Alert—A Parley—Bulldogs and Jungnah—Must we go Back?—A Concession—Thibet Closed—The Camli Village—A Nocturnal Alarm—The Spied Spy—The Barricade—The Advance—Singular Monuments—The Prun Village—Mishmee Villages—The Plundered Traders—Bowsong—Curious Greeting—A Sahib's Word—Courteous Welcome—New Year's Eve.

WITH the first dawn of day we left Larkong, and commenced the ascent of the boundary mountain, a long, steep ridge, rising to a height of over five thousand feet. The range runs almost due east, and forms a well-defined limit between Assamese and Thibetan ground.

The Degaroo Mishmees, on the south, profess to be allies of the British; and those on the north adhere to the Thibetans, who claim suzerainty to the northern foot of the mountain.

Fortunately, the path ascended was tolerably good, so that I limped along pretty successfully. One half of the ascent lay through dense tree and bamboo jungle, which gradually gave place to trees of stunted growth and long, wiry grass, as we gained the top of the ridge along which the path wound, following all the indenta-

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tions of the backbone of the mountain. As we neared the highest elevation, scattered trees and shrubs seemed to grow from a thick bed of dry moss, and here, for the first time, I saw the teta plant growing abundantly. The roots (from which, when brewed and steeped in hot water, the famous febrifuge is made) are embedded in the moss. From each root springs a single stem, about four inches high, bearing three serrated leaves, attached to the head of the stalk like elongated trefoil. The Mishmees gather the roots towards the end of the rainy season, and carry them packed in tiny wickerwork bamboo baskets to Sudiya, where they are eagerly bought by Assamese and Bengalee merchants.

At the highest point of the ridge we halted for our midday meal, somewhat fatigued with the long, toilsome climb. The sun had considerable power, but a keen, cold wind, which blew from a snow-capped mountain to the northward, caused us all to shiver with cold.

The grandeur of the scene from our elevated position made me draw aside from the rest of the party to contemplate it. Several thousand feet below, the plain of Northern Assam stretched far away in the distance, intersected by the Bramapootra and its numerous tributaries, the course of each of which could be traced like the black lines denoting rivers on a map. The atmosphere was so clear that the numerous forests could be distinctly seen with the shade of their trees, while the distant horizon seemed to melt into a blue haze, forming a strong contrast to the prospect to the north. There, mountain ranges, one after the other, towered

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upwards in bare nakedness, many of the higher peaks, crowned with snow, sparkling in the sunlight like gorgeous gems. All was sombre and wild. Deep, pine-clad ravines, in which many a black bear is to be found, were succeeded by bare limestone crags, forming the almost inaccessible home of the timid takin. As we turned to descend the counter slope of the boundary mountain, I took one last glance at the peaceful plain of Assam, recalling many a happy evening spent with kind-hearted friends, and continued the steep descent, which led to the grand but hostile regions before us.

The north side or counter slope of the mountain was so precipitous, that it required great effort to keep from slipping, as the rocks were all damp from the melting of snow which had apparently fallen the previous night, as patches here and there were still visible. No sun ever appeared to warm the dark ravine down which we stumbled, and the raw, damp cold was excessive.

About four in the afternoon we camped near the bottom of the ravine, and tried to warm ourselves over the fires, but all to no purpose; the damp wood would scarcely burn, while sleep was out of the question, for the cold of the wet earth struck icily through our improvised beds of partly-withered fern leaves, causing frightful stiffness and rheumatic pains. In this sorry plight we made up a huge fire, and, huddling round it, slowly dragged out the night in talking, smoking, and watching by turn. The misery of that night I have never forgotten, nor the joy with which I welcomed the first dawn of day. Tea was soon brewed, with which

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my party washed down a little cold rice, while Philip and myself shared part of a small chicken, reserved from the plentiful supplies at Kaysong's.

After stumbling along the rocky bed of the ravine for about an hour, Chowsam suddenly called a halt, the distant sound of voices having arrested his attention. Our party had been carefully marshalled in the morning by Chowsam, and the order of march was strictly attended to, so that the moment the chief called a halt our advance and rear guard closed on Chowsam, myself, and Philip, who formed the centre. Such precautions were necessary now, as we were in a hostile country, where Kysa's clan cherished their blood feud against Englishmen. From the time that we crossed the boundary mountain, none of us undressed or laid aside our weapons. Travelling among people whose code of law entails upon them the necessity of taking life for life, makes one careless of those social habits which raise civilized man above his fellows who live more in a state of nature.

Having come to a standstill, we calmly awaited the appearance of the approaching party, whose merry shouts and singing proclaimed them to be peaceable, so we somewhat relaxed our defensive attitude. When the strangers appeared, Chowsam hailed them, and they turned out to be a party of traders, followed by two chiefs and their attendants, who were *en route* to Kaysong's house to stop my proceeding farther into the Meju country. The trading party kept on their way, but when the chiefs got up to us, a long parley was

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held. They desired us to return to the summit of the boundary range, and receive there the instructions sent down from the Thibetan authorities at Roemah. To this Chowsam objected, and it was some time before the chiefs—whose names were Samsang and Nhatsong—would sit down for a talk; but Chowsam, producing his opium and a pipe, decided the question in our favour. A space was cleared, and, each party sitting opposite to the other, with a fire between, commenced smoking in silence.

Our visitors were not by any means prepossessing in appearance: Samsang, chief of the Lama clan inhabiting the country immediately on the Thibetan frontiers, was a thick-set man of middle height, with a villanous cast of countenance, a feline expression about his eye begetting a feeling of distrust towards him. Nhatsong, the head of the Camli clan, whose country we were now in, was tall, with a weather-beaten face not unpleasing in expression, while a full, soft eye bespoke a gentleness evident in his manner.

For the space of half an hour not a single word passed between either party, each seemingly waiting for the other to open the conversation. Chowsam and myself by a meaning look conveyed to each other our determination to make Samsang begin the inevitable discussion on the subject of proceeding on our journey. At last this chief, without uttering a word, handed me a packet of letters, addressed to the French missionaries at Bathang by Captain Gregory, which Chowsam the year before had left with the Thibetan authorities at

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Roemah to be forwarded. Having read the address, I returned them to Samsang without making any observation. This somewhat disconcerted him, and with an effort, heralded by a long-drawn sigh, he quietly requested us to return to our country, because the Chinese Rajah at Roemah had sent the letters, with a Thibetan dog and a knife, as an amicable present, if I consented, but if I persevered in advancing, it would be at the risk of encountering many such knives and watchdogs.

Samsang having said this much, came over to our side of the fire and begged me not to be angry with him, as he could not help himself. His house was within a few miles of the first Thibetan outpost, where two hundred soldiers were waiting to arrest me, and all the Meju chiefs assembled in council had decided that I should not pass through their country.

It was evident that a difficulty had arisen. The return of the letters, with the present of the Thibetan dog and knife, were unmistakeable signs that the Thibetan officials were on the alert, and my experience of them whilst travelling in Eastern Thibet made it evident that I should not be allowed to reach Bathang, and thus accomplish the object of my journey. This was a painful consideration. But I quietly told Samsang that I was a peaceable man, not desiring to cause trouble, but anxious for peace and trade. I should, therefore, go on, for even the demons of their country would not harm a stranger travelling on such a mission. To this Samsang replied that the road through their country was closed, and they would be bound to stop me in some

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way. Having thus spoken, he retired to his fire and declined further conversation.

Chowsam now, like a skilful general, supplied the Mishmees liberally with opium, a luxury they could not resist. When they had smoked themselves into a good humour, Chowsam proposed that we should proceed to the place where they had camped the previous night, and the chiefs so far relented as to agree to the proposition, provided we would go no farther.

At the Mishmee camping-place, we found the fires still burning, so we had nothing to do but to pitch the blanket-tent and make ourselves comfortable for the night.

After a scanty meal of boiled hill rice and a few yams—roasted in the embers—the camp-fires were made up for the night—that of the Mishmees some twenty yards from ours, and each party kept a separate watch. Before dark, Chowsam and myself went over to the Mishmee camp to smoke a pipe, and Samsang expressed a wish to inspect my bulldogs, which were chained up, as usual, one at the entrance and the other at the back of the tent. Forgetting the presence of the fierce Thibetan dog—a huge animal, as big as a Newfoundland—I told Philip to let them loose. No sooner had he done so than they made a dash through the Mishmee camp, upsetting one or two men in their passage, and fastened on the Thibetan, whose loud baying, on hearing my voice, attracted their attention. The poor brute being tied up stood no chance against my savage pets, and it soon became evident that the bulldogs would kill him unless

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they were taken off. This was easier said than done; neither Khamtees nor Mishmees would interfere, while I was so weak and crippled by my ankle, that I was almost afraid to venture near the Thibetan brute. However, I did not want to lose the dog, so managed to catch my bulldog 'Bob' by the tail and choked him off; whereupon the strange dog turned upon the bull-bitch, and I was obliged to let 'Bob' go to the rescue.

The excitement soon became great, the Mishmees, several of whom had been severely bitten by the Thibetan dog, were in ecstacies at the courage of the bulls, and when at last they left the big dog apparently lifeless, the savages gave vent to their pleasure in loud shouts, and the bulls were passed round in review before they were again chained up. The Thibetan dog suffered less than one might have supposed; he soon recovered himself, and bayed as loudly as ever. He was a superb animal, with a beautiful wolf-like head; a straight, long, and very thick black coat of hair covered his body, while his legs, beautifully tan-marked, were smooth; but the finest feature about him was his huge bushy tail, which curled majestically over his back. Wishing to get a better look at him, I drew near, when he struggled so hard to get at me that the chain broke, and but that I knew their savage nature, from my Thibetan experience, there is little doubt that I should have been severely mauled; as it was, I had armed myself with a bludgeon before venturing near him, and as he sprang I dealt him a blow which brought him down senseless. On his recovering, I laid into him with all my might until

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he bolted and sought shelter among the Mishmees, whither I followed, and eventually put on a collar and chain belonging to one of the other dogs and tied him up near the tent. From this time we were the best of friends. These dogs are very difficult to keep alive in countries where there is much heat, and I believe only one of the species besides mine has ever reached England.*

After the excitement had subsided, and Chowsam had decided on the course to pursue with regard to proceeding, I sent for the two chiefs, who came, accompanied by a young Mishmee, a nephew of Bowsong. A long talk ensued between them and Chowsam, while, as a silent spectator, I watched the party with great interest. At times Samsang appeared very angry and excited, but the elder chief remained passive, only occasionally venturing a remark, which seemed to be generally an approval of something Chowsam was saying. Nearly two hours were thus spent, and the Mishmees returned to their fire. As soon as they had left us, Chowsam told me that we should have to go back. The old chief had proposed that we should go on to Bowsong's village and meet the assembled Meju chiefs in council, but Samsang would not consent, although Chowsam had offered him a bribe of forty rupees.

At this I could not conceal my disappointment; it was too hard to have suffered so much for nothing, and, fearing lest Chowsam might be lukewarm in the matter,

* This dog, named Jungnah, I presented to Mr. Jolland, of Buxshall, near Lindfield, in Sussex, who has had him now for three years or more.

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I promised him that on our arrival at Bathang I would give him an extra five hundred rupees. I had sent a remittance to the French missionaries at Bathang, by way of China, and I was therefore in a position to keep my word with the Khamtee chief. The offer of the additional five hundred rupees evidently made a great impression on Chowsam, and I turned in, still hoping against hope.

In the middle of the night I awoke, and got up to smoke a pipe with Chowsam, who sat brooding over the fire. While we silently contemplated the embers, Bowsong's nephew joined us, and appeared anxious to talk. I therefore retired and left them together. In a short time Chowsam came to me and said, that the Mishmees were agreeable to our proceeding as far as Bowsong's village, provided I would give my promise not to go farther. Chowsam urged me to give the promise, as without it we should be at the mercy of the Kysa clan, whereas, if I agreed, the Mejus would be responsible for me, and I could see more of their country. Otherwise, even if we succeeded in getting through the Meju country, the soldiers at Roemah would arrest us. I reminded him that he would lose his five hundred rupees if we did not get to Bathang, but he begged me not to consider that, as we had no chance of entering Thibet.

It was not without an effort that I at last gave the promise, and with its utterance departed the last ray of hope which had sustained me so far through all hardships.

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By the time that all was settled with the Mishmees, daylight had broken, and Samsang started for Bowsong's village, to carry the news of our approaching visit. The old chief, Nhatsong, remained as a guarantee for our safety, and, as the day further advanced, we followed.

Ascending a steep mountain, we reached its summit shortly after mid-day, whence we looked down on the Camli village, the residence of our guide, the chief Nhatsong. To the north and east were high snow-capped mountains, the lower declivities dotted with Mishmee dwellings, surrounded by patches of cultivated land, while the absence of dense jungle, save in occasional ravines, formed a striking contrast to the country hitherto traversed. Our road from this ran parallel with the Bramapootra, along the grassy slopes of the mountains, which extended in table lands to the bank of the river, and occasional clumps of pine trees marked a change of climate. Shortly after noon we reached Nhatsong's house, where a pig was killed in honour of our arrival.

The three following days we pursued our way without much to cause excitement, but while we were camped on the verge of a deeply-wooded ravine, under the shade of some trees, one incident occurred which for a short time caused me deep anxiety. We had made a long march during the day, and by eight o'clock the whole camp, except those on watch, were wrapped in sleep. Even the two sentinels were half-dozing over the watch-fire, and I was, probably, the only person thoroughly awake.

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I had dispensed with the blanket-tent, having made up my bed under a tree, a few yards distant from the watch-fire, and almost at the edge of the ravine. The two bulldogs were curled up at my feet, while I indulged in a pleasant reverie over a pipe. The scene around was truly wild. The watch-fires lighted up a space all round the camp, and the leaves of the tree under which I reclined danced about in the unusual light, shaken by a scarcely perceptible breeze. My own fire, close by, burnt brightly, and I laid dreaming most comfortably, every now and then gazing round almost unconsciously. Suddenly I fancied that I saw a human head raised just above the brink of the ravine, but when I fixed my gaze on the spot, nothing was there, so I paid no more attention to it; indeed, I was scarcely conscious that such a thought had passed through my brain, when suddenly the bulldog Bob rose stealthily and crept—crouching almost to the ground—to the edge of the ravine; he then sat down, with ears cocked, and sniffed the air. He was a peculiar dog, very savage and sullen, never noticing any person but myself; in fact, the Khamtees laughed at him, and called him a sleepy dog. On this occasion, however, I knew from his manner that something was astir, and watched him, until he again began creeping over the edge of the ravine. Upon this I shouldered my rifle and followed him, when, to my intense astonishment, I saw distinctly, within twenty yards of me, a human figure, crouching down and steadily advancing towards me. I immediately called out to Chowsam, who started to his feet, while the bull-bitch

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Nell went after Bob to see what was up, and both followed the retreating form, the bitch, which had some of the terrier breed in her, giving tongue.

When Chowsam heard what I had seen, he replied, laughingly, that probably a bear, attracted by the smell of our camp, had paid us a visit, but the idea of a Mishmee prowling about in the dark seemed too ridiculous, their superstitious fears of the demons being against such a supposition. I disdained to argue the question, and so lay down again, but the dogs kept barking at the foot of the ravine, and at last I determined to go down and see what was really exciting them. I thought I might have been mistaken, and if it was a bear perhaps the dogs might come to grief. So, again shouldering my rifle, I made my way to the bottom of the ravine, guided by the barking of the dogs.

Greatly to my surprise I found them keeping guard over a Mishmee who had perched himself on a large boulder in the bed of the torrent. There was no mistake now, and I again called out for Chowsam. Directly I hallooed the stranger sprang off his perch and fled down the ravine followed into the darkness by the bulldogs. Thinking to startle the spy, or whatever our visitor was, I let fly a barrel of my rifle, taking care to aim above him. Having done this I whistled in the dogs, and as they came to heel Chowsam joined me with some of his men. On telling them again what I had seen they would not believe it, saying that no Mishmee could venture to prowl about in the dark. They were not to

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be convinced, so I returned to camp and laid down again, but not to sleep.

The following morning I was the first to rouse all hands, and after a scanty breakfast we began another day's march. Having crossed the stream at the bottom of the ravine, near the place where I had seen the nocturnal visitor, we ascended the ravine until we came to a turn, when we were suddenly alarmed by Nhatsong and another Mishmee who accompanied him, rushing back to us saying that the path was closed and we must not proceed as some of the Mejus were evidently hostile. The old chief Nhatsong protested loudly against this breach of faith on the part of Samsang, who had promised to remove the barrier on his way to Bowsong's. The erection of such barriers by the Mishmees is a custom of some importance, and is tantamount to a declaration of hostility towards a stranger, who, if he removes it without the consent of the chief in whose territory it is erected, perpetrates an insult punishable by death or a heavy fine.

In our case the barrier had been left by Samsang, but with what intent is uncertain. Chowsam was furious: he said that Samsong had left it so that we should have to bribe the chiefs in Bowsong's country for permission to pass. But as Samsang had promised to remove it himself on receipt of a present of forty rupees, Chowsam ordered Nhatsong to pull it down. This he refused to do until the chief, bidding me draw my revolver, drew his own knife, and ordered his men to surround me. The Khamtees, elated at the prospect of a fight, ranged

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themselves round me, while Chowsam in company with Nhatsong and other Mishmees advanced to the barricade. Having carefully examined the erection, which consisted of logs of wood and green branches thrown carelessly across the path, Chowsam with the aid of the Mishmees cleared it away and the whole party passed on.

We could easily have passed round the barrier but its existence would still have made our progress dangerous. As it was our position was not comfortable. On the other side of the barrier we found traces of a Mishmee camp, which had been so recently occupied that the fires were still burning. This was unmistakeable evidence that our steps were dogged by an unfriendly party: for if well disposed, they would have joined us instead of camping at a distance after dark, which they must have done, as some of our Khamtees had been within a few yards of the spot the previous evening in search of dry firewood, and had observed nothing. This adventure convinced our party of the presence of my nocturnal visitor, and the general conclusion arrived at was that some of Kysa's men were dogging us. My own opinion, however, was that the Mejus were quietly keeping a sharp eye on us, and the subsequent behaviour of Bowsong convinced me that I was right.

After leaving the barricade we continued on until noon without any signs of hostility and halted near the base of a large rock in the vicinity of a clear little mountain stream. Close by were several bamboo posts about twelve feet high, and on the top of which the skull and jawbones of a yak were fastened. On enquiring of

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Chowsam the meaning of this, he told me of the following curious custom which prevailed amongst the Mishmees.

In cases of the seduction of a married or a single woman the whole clan—of which the woman is a member—resent the wrong. The head of her house slaughters a bullock or yak and invites the elders of his clan to a feast. The skull and jawbones of the animal, after the flesh has been consumed, are taken and placed, as described, on the highway, and remain there as a sign to all passers by, who soon spread the news, that such and such a clan has been wronged. Then all the chiefs of the tribe assemble in council to decide on the amount of damage to be paid by the male offender. But if, previous to this, the offender has paid the price of the bullock and taken the woman to wife, the skull and bones are removed and the matter looked upon as settled; if not, the Council of Chiefs award heavy damages to the head of the woman's family, father or husband as the case may be, who, in case of default by the offender, takes revenge on his clan, and in doing so is helped by all the chiefs and their followers.

After our mid-day meal a march of several hours brought us to the top of a high ridge whence we saw the Prun village immediately below us. It was picturesquely situated on a table land which sloped down from the mountains to the river. The Mishmees never name their villages, and this fact renders it difficult to find one's way through their country. To a certain extent they are nomadic. A clan, consisting of three or

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four houses, will settle on a spot, and while their houses are habitable they will reside in them, but when old and decayed, new houses are built, sometimes miles away from the old ones, which are then deserted. From this custom it is impossible to give a geographical position to any village: a village may be in existence to-day and a few years hence the place thereof will know it no more. Thence the residence of a clan is always alluded to as gam so and so, according to the name of its chief, and on the chief's death the place takes the son's name. In order to find the descendants of Bowsong after his death it would be necessary to ask for the Prun clan, and trace his descendants amongst the chief families. As the Mishmees have no written character nor any mode of keeping a record of time it would be almost impossible to trace the descendants of Bowsong a hundred years hence, as the names do not descend from father to son and only one name is used. This, I believe, is the case amongst all the other savage tribes on the frontiers of Assam.

Descending the hill we arrived at the house of Seng-song, a cousin of Bowsong's, to which we were refused admission on the plea that there was sickness in it, but I had caught sight of two Thibetans as they bolted into the house on our approach. Bowsong's house lay half a mile farther on and we reached it about sunset. Not a soul appeared in the village. On entering the strangers' room the only occupants were two Khamtees from the Upper Khamtee country, who made a low obeisance to Chowsam on his entrance. For two hours

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we sat in the house without a soul coming near us, and I began to think we were not going to be welcomed at all. At last Bowsong's eldest brother came in and seated himself at the fire without a word, according to Mishmee etiquette. After a while he informed us, keeping his eyes fixed on the fire, that Bowsong was absent on some business in Samsang's country, whose clan had robbed the two Khamtees of some knives.

These men were in a sorry plight: everything had been taken from them but their waist cloths, and they were footsore and weary from a long journey of over fifteen days from their country to Bowsong's village; the road passing through a very mountainous district, without even savage inhabitants. It is surprising what physical difficulties trade will sometimes overcome. The Upper Khamtee traders venture among the Mishmees and many other tribes of Assam at the constant risk of life and property, but still they trade, and through their industry the whole of Northern Assam is provided with knives, while the different tribes are largely indebted to them for their silver ornaments, made of the metal obtained from rich silver mines belonging to the Upper Khamtee chiefs.

About 10 P.M. Bowsong appeared and sat down as his brother had done, without taking the least notice of us. This Mishmee style of greeting is not calculated to inspire a stranger with confidence, yet there is something in the motive which actuates it. The Mishmees say that when people become guests in the house they belong to it, and consequently if the master were to greet them with great

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professions of gladness, it would make the guests feel as though they were strangers in the house.

After sitting a while Bowsong asked Chowsam some trifling questions about the Sahib, and with this beginning they commenced a talk. The Mishmee chief required me to swear not to attempt to proceed beyond the village. Assuming the stoical manner of the chief, I replied, steadily directing my gaze into the fire, that my word had already been given, and a Sahib's word could not be broken. Without replying, the Mishmee chief rose, entered an outer room, and speedily returned followed by three or four of his wives laden with rice, beans, boiled pork, yams, and rice beer. Presenting first a plate of rice to Chowsam and myself, he bade us welcome in a peculiarly courteous voice, and with pleasing grace of manner. After which the women served the rest of the party, each in turn receiving a welcome from our host. He then left us for the night, saying that we must be tired and wish to sleep, as he did himself, having walked all day.

The women remained with us until a late hour, being highly entertained by Chowsam, who kept them in roars of laughter. Of course the Sahib was minutely inspected, his weapons, clothes, and complexion, each receiving appropriate observations. In this manner I spent New Year's Eve of 1870, surrounded by a tribe of savages, feared for their treachery, and still almost red-handed with the blood of two poor missionaries who, save myself, were the only Europeans who had ventured to trust themselves to their hospitality.

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However, I solaced myself under the disappointment of being compelled to desist from any attempt to reach Bathang, by determining to conciliate the Meju Mishmees, and induce some of their haughty chiefs to return with me to Sudiya, that they might assure themselves of our friendly disposition towards them, and thus be led to trade with the Assamese in the plains, and become a medium of introducing tea into Thibet. Full of this thought I fell asleep just as the old year was dying out.

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS.

Mine Host—Killing a Yak—Mishmee Marriages—The Price of a Wife—Ceremonials—Social Laws—Religion—Philip and the Thibetans—The Khamtee Traders—Respect for the Chief—Our Officials—Assemblage of Chiefs—Bowsong's Oration—Difficult Questions—A Dangerous Dilemma—Pacific Conclusion—Deputation of Chiefs to Sudiya—Peace with the Mejus—Road-making—Brick Tea for Thibet—Sengsong—True Hospitality—Rifle Practice—A Lucky Shot—My Lame Ankle—The Soothsayer's Prescription—Homewards.

BOWSONG'S household were astir early the following morning, busily preparing a feast for a number of the Meju chiefs, who had signified their intention of being present at a general council in the evening. Mine host was evidently a great man in his own country. He stood about five feet six inches, with a herculean frame and a countenance expressive of the keenest intelligence, but his eyes being very small and bright gave him a look of cunning not altogether pleasing, while thin closely compressed lips spoke of cruel determination; but his face was singularly expressive, and an exact index of the feelings, hostile or amiable, by which he happened to be influenced.

He greeted me most hospitably on entering the strangers' room, and told Chowsam, with the air of a

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lord, that he was going to kill a yak in honour of the English Queen, and to celebrate the arrival of the first English guest that had honoured his village.

The slaughter of either bullock, yak, or mhitton amongst the Mishmees is a rare occurrence, and only takes place on the most important occasions, such as deaths, marriages, &c. The slaughter is always performed with great ceremony. The animal, with a halter round its neck, is held by a slave, while the men of the house with drawn knives form a circle round it, the women and children standing in a group at a respectful distance from the men. Then, amidst a solemn silence the chief or head of the house steps forward with his large Thibetan knife, and calmly surveying the animal for a few minutes, with a sudden tiger-like spring, delivers a frightful cut on its loins, apparently paralysing it. The chief then retires, and all the men rush in and with horrible yells hack and hew at the wretched beast until it falls with piteous groans, and long before life is extinct lumps of the quivering flesh are cut off and thrown to the women and children, who scramble for the warm bloody pieces, and, amidst frantic shouts of delight carry them to the house, where they are boiled for the feast. This ceremony is a ghastly spectacle, and sickened me, especially when Chowsam informed me that prisoners are killed in this way, and that the unfortunate missionaries, Crick and Bourie, had been surrounded and hacked to death in a similar manner.

The ceremony of killing the yak took place about seven in the morning, and by nine o'clock several chiefs

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had arrived, and a large gathering sat down to the feast. I was too unwell to join in the revelry; indeed, the sight of the Mishmees handling and tearing at huge lumps of parboiled flesh was too much for *me*, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I managed to eat a roasted egg.

The whole day was one continued feast. Chiefs and their followers kept dropping in at intervals until the walls of the strangers' room appeared like an armoury, decorated with their spears which were placed against them.

My ankle was now so bad that I had done the last day's march on a couple of crutches. A large abscess was forming under the ankle bone, and every movement caused indescribable agony; under these circumstances I could only lie down and observe my companions while they conversed.

Bowsong was most communicative, and during the day I learnt from him a great deal about the manners and customs of the Mishmees. The chief's youngest brother, a youth some eighteen years old, asked during breakfast if I was married, and receiving a reply in the negative, he sympathised with me, saying that he was not married either, as he had not yet got enough heads as a dowry for his bride. This remark led to Bowsong's telling me something about Mishmee marriages.

The ceremony is highly original. Women are priced at from fifty to five hundred heads, and a large family of daughters are very valuable, especially if they be well favoured. When the eldest son and heir of a family

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has made his choice he speaks to his father, who undertakes to treat with the young lady's parents, and thereupon considerable bargaining takes place between the two families; if the coveted fair one be very beautiful it sometimes takes months to complete the bargain. When, however, this matter is settled, the young man pays his future father-in-law a visit, taking with him a number of heads as part of the purchase-money, which he hands over to the old gentleman, and is then allowed to court the young lady, whose heart he seeks to gain in the first place by making her father a present. After this visit the young woman's father pays the lover's family a visit, taking to his future son-in-law a present equal to the number of heads received. If, after this visit, all are mutually satisfied, the young man takes the rest of the bargain-money to the father-in-law, who thereupon hands over the daughter, giving her as a dowry a share of the heads paid for her. Until they have become the parents of grown-up children, the men and women never eat meat in each other's presence, nor can a man (except on very solemn occasions) eat meat in a father-in-law's house. This peculiar custom when a man has many wives (and he always keeps as many as he can afford) often prevents him from eating flesh in any house in the village save his own. Poor younger sons have to work very hard for a wife, for they get no help from their father, but have to trade sometimes for years before they can bring their wives home to a house of their own; but on payment of a part of the purchase-money the youth may marry and visit his wife at her father's house,

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though she and her children can never leave it until every head is paid. This custom is a great stimulus to the young men in their musk-hunting and trading excursions, for until they pay for their wives they hold no position, and their wives and children have to work for the benefit of the wife's family.

The two most important ceremonies of the Mishmees are undoubtedly those attending deaths and marriages. In the case of sickness a soothsayer is called in and he generally prescribes the sacrifice of fowls or pigs, according to the state of the patient. These sacrifices he orders as a propitiation to the demon who is supposed to be instrumental in causing sickness. When death ensues, particularly in the case of a chief, mhittons, pigs, and fowls are killed without stint, and all the old men and women feast to their hearts' content, hospitality being considered a great virtue. They eat in honour of the departed, talking the while of his great and good qualities. The body is burnt after two days and the ashes collected and placed in a miniature house, erected close to the family residence. This unique tomb is then surrounded by some of the skulls collected by the chief during his lifetime, which serve as a monument to his past hospitality, while the rest of his treasures are divided amongst his sons, the son-and-heir taking the lion's share. When there are no sons the skulls go to the nearest male relations. The eldest son takes the title of gam, or chief, and holds a yearly feast in honour of his deceased father, which is considered one of the most sacred observances amongst them.

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The laws which regulate their social system are simple but most effective. In case of murder a Council of Chiefs is held, and on proof of guilt the nearest male relative cuts up the culprit at pleasure, or takes heavy compensation. Should, however, the victim be a slave belonging to another person a fine of five mhittons settles the matter if paid; if not, the offender is punished generally by reprisals, against which there is no remedy. Any owner may kill his own slave at pleasure.

As to religion, their notions are very vague. Polytheism, encumbered with all the rites and ceremonies of fetishism, is their true creed. The yearly sacrifice and feast in honour of their deceased parents shows that they have some idea of a future state, but I could not find out their particular ideas, as death is a disagreeable subject of conversation among them, and Chowsam always declined to interpret questions relating to it.

During the day I sent Philip out to make observations as to the Thibetans whom we had seen at the house of Sengsong on the night of our arrival. He had been recognised by the Mishmees as a Jarmin, or Chinese, and as such was a favourite, so that when he sallied forth he was accompanied by several young Mejus, who paid him great attention. He returned after an absence of more than two hours and amused me by relating his adventures. Having left Bowsong's house, he wandered about without any apparent object, and finally took the road to Sengsong's, but with such an apparent innocence that his companions never dreamed of his object. He supplied them liberally with tobacco, but as luck would

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have it they could not muster a light among them, and when they came to Sengsong's house they went in to get one, just the very thing the clever little fellow wanted. Inside he found the two Thibetans seated at the fire, with the chief Sengsong. On seeing Philip, and recognising him for a Chinaman, they rose respectfully, and one of them greeted him in Chinese. This was a good opening, so he assumed an air of superiority and questioned them on their business in the Meju country. They informed him that they had been sent from Roemah, now distant one long day's march, by the Thibetans, to watch the proceedings of the Palin,* and asked Philip if he knew my intentions? Was I a great general intent upon opening a road through the Mishmee country for the passage of an army to come and take Thibet? Upon his informing them of my object they were highly amused, saying that the officials at Roemah were in a great state of anxiety about me, and had received instructions from L'hassa to prevent Tang Koopah † entering Thibet at all hazards, in consequence of which a large party of soldiers was stationed at Roemah to prevent my going on.

From this conversation it was evident that the authorities at L'hassa had learnt from India that I intended to try and reach Bathang, and at once concerted measures to prevent me. This knowledge, while it showed that the Mishmees were not to blame, convinced me that

* Thibetan word for Englishmen in India.

† This is the name by which I am known in China and Eastern Thibet.

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any efforts to reach Thibet from India would be futile for the present.

I mentioned the presence in Bowsong's house of two Khamtees from the Upper Khamtee country, who had been robbed by the Lamat clan. In the course of the day the plundered knives were brought to Bowsong, who returned them to the Khamtees, and they at once entered into a brisk trade with the assembled guests, who eagerly bought the knives in exchange for slaves. These Khamtee knives form one of the great articles of barter between the Assamese and Mishmees, the latter always bringing numbers with them on their trading excursions to the plains.

It was very interesting to see the great respect with which these Khamtee traders treated Chowsam: they never took a seat in his presence without asking permission, and always addressed him as 'Gohain' (lord or chief). The Mishmees likewise treated him with great distinction as the son of their former lord, and I could not but remember with regret that the custom which obtains among our officials in Assam renders it necessary for a man like Chowsam to stand in their presence. It is true that all semi-barbarous people seem to Europeans childish in their pride, but it should be remembered that an hereditary savage chief in his own country is a lord, holding over his people the power of life and death, and thus naturally conscious of his dignity, making his subjects stand before him as inferiors; it must therefore be felt as a great indignity for these chiefs to stand in the presence of our police

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officers and others, and pay them all the marks of abject submission, such as their own people pay to them. While the humbling of haughty savage chiefs is necessary for the maintenance of our authority, I think the humiliating process should rather be carried on by exacting from them the punctual fulfilment of all orders received from Her Majesty's Government than by degrading them in the eyes of their people: after all, the chiefs are those who keep the tribes together and render the mass obedient to their own social laws; and, where the chiefs are friendly disposed towards us, their people will certainly more readily better obey our orders. A tribe without respect for the chiefs are indeed sorry subjects. From long experience of savages and their life, I say without hesitation that it is a mistake to degrade the chiefs before our officials. Everyone visiting our frontier stations throughout India should be treated with some show of consideration, and be allowed to sit in the presence of our officials, not on an equality of rank, but certainly as superior to the menials attending our officer and their own slaves and followers.

I never knew a case in which chiefs whom I have had to treat as equals in their own country, did anything which would have detracted from my dignity had I been then a British official. On the contrary, treating them with consideration has invariably heightened their respect for me.

The Chinese political officer who presides over the tribes on the south-western frontiers of China, when I was in prison in his Yamun t Weiseefoo, always asked

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the principal chiefs of the tribes to dine with him when they visited the station, and the Government provided a master of ceremonies, whose duty it was to instruct the chiefs in the etiquette observed on these occasions; and chiefs naturally dirty in their own country, would appear with a decent suit of Chinese clothes when presented to the Mandarin. I question whether we might not take many useful hints from the Chinese in their treatment of frontier tribes, which would help considerably in lessening the difficulty we have at present in keeping many of them quiet.

Towards sundown, all the assembled guests in Bowsong's house began to assume a solemn air, preparatory to meeting in council. An earnest conversation commenced among the assembled chiefs and at last five of their number were chosen to represent the Mishmee tribes, viz.: Bowsong, Sengsong, Samsang, Tengke, and Nhatsong.* These drew round the fire and folding their hands before them, sat gazing at the hearth with an air of solemn deliberation. This was a hint that the rest of the guests and women of the house evidently understood, for one by one they silently withdrew until Chowsam, with his men, myself, Philip, and the negro, were left alone with the chiefs. On a hint from Chowsam I had followed his example and taken up my position at the fire. After this, for nearly half an hour, we sat without a word being uttered. At last, Bowsong told Chowsam in a peculiar sing-song tone of

* See Appendix.

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voice, that the chiefs were ready to talk, an announcement which they agreed to by a loud grunt.

After a short interval of silence, Bowsong commenced a long speech, beginning calmly but gradually working himself into excitement, which was made evident by the increased animation of his face and the raised tones of his voice. Though I could not understand a word, I felt that the chief was an orator, his emphatic declamation and energetic but graceful gesticulation riveted my attention, and I allowed him to see the admiration which he excited. Bowsong evidently felt great satisfaction at having made an impression on the Englishman, and acknowledged my attention by repeatedly mentioning my name in modulated accents accompanied with a profound bow towards me. When he concluded, all expressed their applause by prolonged grunts, an example which I followed.

I had determined to make use of the negro as interpreter at this council, because the interval necessary for translation would give me an advantage, especially as I now pretty well understood Assamese. As Chowsam interpreted from Mishmee into Assamese, I knew the nature of the communication, and while the negro translated from Assamese into English I prepared my reply.

Bowsong in his address had related the particulars of the murder of Crick and Bourie, and dilated on the grievances suffered by Mishmees from the British Government, notably the protection given to runaway slaves and their treatment in the plains. He ended by

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asking in the name of the tribes why—when I knew that the Mejus were at enmity with my people — I had come amongst them.

To this question I replied at some length, setting forth that I was a peaceable man, intent on enquiring nto the trade of different countries. As to the murder of the missionaries, I assured them that this matter was settled when Kysa was hanged, and begged the Mejus not to remain away from Sudiya on that account, for the Commissioner Sahib had authorised me to tell them that the Mejus were at liberty to come down to the plains whenever they liked for purposes of trade. As to their liberated slaves, in our country the great chief, our Queen, had given orders that no person, either man or woman, was to be kept as a slave: all who lived in our country were free, and the Queen's orders must be obeyed in that respect.

This having been interpreted, Bowsong asked how the Mejus could be our friends, seeing that the neighbouring tribe of Chullacottah Mishmeees had murdered the chief Lumling, who had assisted Lieutenant Eden in the capture of Kysa, while the British authorities had made no reply to an appeal for protection from the family of Lumling. This question was asked with great asperity of manner, and the mention of Lumling's death seemed to irritate the chiefs very much, for they scowled at me and handled their knives in a disagreeable manner.

Meanwhile our Khamtees who had been sitting apart at the farther end of the room, had edged themselves nearer and nearer, so that by the time Bowsong

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had made his angry interrogation, they ranged themselves in a wider circle round the council, which the excitement of the chiefs rendered a wise precaution. While the negro was being spoken to by Chowsam, I understood what was said, and had ample time to think of a suitable reply to the question, which if otherwise coming suddenly would have taken me considerably unawares.

As it was, I quietly remarked that it was not known amongst the English in Assam that the Meju Mishmees were afraid of the Chullacottahs; it was generally understood that the Mejus were great warriors, and able to take care of themselves. If the missionaries had not been murdered, this trouble would not have come upon the Mejus. Again, the Mejus had told me that they were subjects of the Thibetan Government, by whose order they had prevented me reaching Thibet; they should, therefore, apply to the Thibetans for protection against the Chullacottahs. This answer completely disconcerted Bowsong; and the older chief, Samsang, his cousin, said that the subject had better be dropped.

Bowsong then asked why the messengers sent by the Mejus to Sudiya could never get an answer to any complaint made by the Mejus. To this I replied that if the Mejus had anything to say to the Commissioner, the chiefs should go down themselves, and not send slaves, who preferred to remain in the plains as freemen. As to their slaves being treated as chiefs, it was very difficult for the Sahibs to know all men who came to them; so

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far, none besides myself had been able to see the Meju chiefs, and no one cared to come amongst them lest they should be killed, as the missionaries were. The Sahibs were not to blame if the Mejus' slaves represented themselves as chiefs. The only way to prevent this was for the chiefs to go down in person. If they would send a deputation, I would be happy to return with them.

This was the first mention I had made of a deputation of chiefs being sent down to Sudiya, and the council took some time to deliberate before Chowsam replied that it was all very well to talk of the chiefs going down to Sudiya, but what guarantee had they that they would not be hanged as Kysa was on account of the death of the missionaries in their country?

I thought this a very natural question for the chiefs to ask, and replied that I would give them my word that no harm should befall them. If that was not sufficient, I would remain in their country as a hostage. This announcement was received with evident marks of approval, and the chiefs consulted amongst themselves for half an hour, Tengke, who belonged to Kysa's clan, alone arguing against the Meju chiefs visiting Sudiya. At last, after considerable wrangling, Bowsong informed me that he and Samsang would accompany me back to Sudiya, and he hoped that their visit would result in peace between the English Queen and the Mejus. Tengke, on behalf of Kysa's clan, undertook to end the blood feud cherished by this clan, and my word for the safety of the deputation was taken as sufficient for their protection. This agreement having been ratified by

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every chief shaking hands with me—being instructed thereto by Chowsam, who evidently thought that this English ceremonial was necessary to render it binding—the council broke up. All the guests once more entered the strangers' room, and all of us made merry over the prospect of establishing peace between the Mejus and the Sahibs.

On retiring to rest towards morning, I could not help congratulating myself on having induced the Mejus to send their chiefs down to Sudiya. It had been said before starting on the expedition that this tribe would form one of the great obstacles to our trading with Thibet through their country, while the impossibility of finding a way through their hills was also quoted as another fatal obstacle. Now, however, the enmity of the Mejus need no longer be feared. As to the road—true, as yet it is impassable for purposes of trade, but with the friendly co-operation of the Mishmee tribes there is no reason why a good one should not be made. The Abors have capital roads leading from the plains through their hills, by which beasts of burthen can travel easily, and when Thibet, in the progress of events, removes her prohibition against the sale of our teas, I have no doubt that the making of a road from Sudiya through the Mishmee hills will be found an easy matter. This, I fear, I shall not live to see; but without presumption I may say, that having induced the Meju chiefs to pay a friendly visit to our territory, has done something towards removing obstacles from the path of those who may hereafter benefit by our tea trade with Thibet.

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There is little doubt that our Assam tea-gardens could supply the whole of Thibet with brick tea. The whole aim in life of the Thibetans seems to be to procure a sufficiency of tea; and it is no cheap luxury, for the Lamas make them pay for it in yaks, horses, labour, and sheep. Even children are sold into slavery to the rapacious priests in payment for brick tea.

If once our Assam teas were allowed to compete with China in the Thibetan market, the monopoly now enjoyed by China would speedily change hands.

The whole of the brick tea sent from China is grown in the western part of the province of Szchuan, and has to be carried on men's backs nearly two hundred miles to Tatsianloo, the first Thibetan frontier town, and thence sixty days' journey on yaks to Bathang, where it is sold at rupees one and a half per pound. Brick tea* could be laid down at Sudiya, with a handsome profit to the Northern Assam tea-planters, at from four to six annas per pound, and a journey from this point to Bathang, through the Mishmee country, with good roads, would be accomplished easily in twenty days. It is plain, therefore, that this tea could be sold at a price in Bathang which would entirely shut out the Chinese article.

Sengsong had made me promise to spend the next day at his house, as the number of guests at Bowsong's was too much even for the resources of that powerful chief. So next afternoon a very large concourse of

* Made from the refuse leaves, after the finer sorts of tea for European use have been manufactured.

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chiefs and their followers assembled at Bowsong's house to pay their respects to me before leaving.

When all were assembled Chowsam gave a present of five rupees each, and some beads and red cloth, to all the chiefs who were present or represented at the council, not forgetting the son of the chief Kysa, who we learnt had dogged our steps from the time that we entered the Meju country, and amidst the good wishes of the assembly I and my party started for Sengsong's house.

The excruciating agony of walking was too much for me; the abscess in my ankle was bigger than a hen's egg, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I reached our new quarters, where I again succumbed to an attack of fever, brought on entirely by the pain of walking.

A curious feature in the fever prevalent in eastern climates is that when a person has once been attacked by it an excess of anger or great mental anxiety will invariably bring on an attack. Suppressed anger or anxiety has often laid me low, and I felt that, with the constrained pain caused by my ankle, the fever would become dangerous, as my spleen was already enlarged.

Our new host, Sengsong, was a fine specimen of a savage, standing over six feet; he was erect as his own spear-shaft, though over sixty years of age. Courteous, kind, and sociable, he was free and hearty of manner, and totally devoid of that childish covetousness natural to all the other chiefs, than whom, moreover, he was much more addicted to cleanliness.

Towards night, when the fever had subsided, he

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brought me some cakes, which he had made himself with flour made from the edible palm tree, with honey and eggs. He had also given Philip a small chicken to prepare for his master. And all these delicacies the old chief laid before me with an air of solicitude that quite won my affection. Everything was served in brass cups and plates, of Chinese manufacture, which he told me he had bought from Chinese merchants in Thibet.

While I was eating, the old fellow sent away his wife and children, and engaged me in a most pleasing conversation about Thibet and China.

On the following day it was evident that I was unfit for travelling; the fever had left me very weak, while my ankle was dreadfully inflamed, so Sengsong made me stay with him for two days more.

In the afternoon previous to our departure Sengsong asked me as a great favour if I would fire off my rifle, as he had never seen one fired; and to please the kind old man I hobbled out of the house for the purpose of firing at a tree. Several young Mishmees gathered round, and one armed with his crossbow, apparently anxious to show his skill as a marksman, aimed at a knot in the branch of a tree about thirty yards off, and lodged his arrow well in the centre. He then asked me if I could beat that with the rifle. I was too ill to feel any interest in beating the young fellow, but I took careful aim at the knot and pulled trigger; the arrow fell, and on being picked up was discovered to have been cut in two close to the tree. The Mejus shouted their applause loudly, and if before they had been afraid

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of the rifle they were now absolutely in terror of it—none of them, not even Sengsong, would touch it. I was of course asked to fire again, but did not care to risk my reputation as a marksman, and retired to the house with Sengsong, leaving the rifle with Chowsam for further examination.

Sengsong was very anxious about my ankle; he appeared to think that I was being badly treated by some of the demons, and suggested calling in a soothsayer—just the very thing that pleased me, as it would afford an opportunity to gain an insight into the Mishmee idea of demons. The soothsayer, who resided alone near the summit of a neighbouring lofty mountain was sent for, and at daylight next morning I was roused for the purpose of being introduced to the great enchanter, who appeared to be stupified or half asleep.

He was dressed like any other Mishmee, only allowing his hair to fall in long, unkempt masses over his shoulders. After inspecting my foot he requested everybody to leave the room, first telling me, through Chowsam, that I must be still and not talk; then stripping himself naked, with the exception of a small cloth round his loins, he squatted on his hams, tailor fashion, alongside of me, and produced a handful of rushes from his waistbelt. These he commenced plaiting and unplaiting, accompanying the operation with a buzzing noise, as though he were counting. Occasionally he would place his hand on my ankle, then shake the rushes over it, keeping his eyes shut the whole time. After carrying on this performance for nearly an hour

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he called Sengsong, and informed him that two fowls must be killed, and my ankle would speedily get well.

When Chowsam came in I told him to ask the soothsayer what devil had been at work on me, and what effect the rushes had on him; but his reverence declined to answer any questions, and with a present of a rupee, some beads and cloth, took himself off in the same sleepy sort of state.

Anyone might have supposed that the wretch had been half stupified by some drug; but of course his manner was assumed, to shroud him in mystery, befitting one who had dealings with devils.

As soon as the soothsayer had taken himself off we breakfasted, and then prepared for the march homewards. Sengsong loaded me with presents of cakes, honey, and eggs, and our men with pork, so that for several days, at least, there was no chance of starvation for the party. As to myself, I had now become so ill from enlarged spleen that nothing would stay on my stomach but tea and Liebig's essence of beef, of which, fortunately, I had two tins to fall back on.

When all was ready for a start I bade good-bye to the kind old Sengsong and his household, and then turned my face homewards.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RETURN.

The Dehong and the Tsan-po — Joined by Bowsong — A Surgical Operation — A Painful March — Gomarshee Berries — Recross the Boundary—Ticks—The Negro Again—A Close Shave—Unable to Walk—Welcome Pomeloes—A Herd of Elephants—A Tiger's Serenade—Hair Leeches—Chowsam's Village—Triumphant Entrance—Voyage to Sudiya — Wild Dogs — Circling a Deer — An Assamese Thunderstorm—Huge Hailstones—Welcome Back to Sudiya—Arrival of the Chiefs—Departure for Calcutta—Home.

IT will be remembered that a few miles below Sudiya the Bramapootra divides, one branch flowing from the north, under the name of the Dehong, while the other, flowing from the east, keeps the name of the Bramapootra. Modern geographers, notwithstanding Klaproth's doubtful authority, have pretty well agreed that the Dehong is the continuation of the Tsan-po, a great river of Thibet, but the want of actual observation leaves the question open, with so much uncertainty attached to it as, it may be hoped, will attract the speedy attention of English explorers.

My journey through the Mishmee country had taken me generally parallel with the Bramapootra, which, at Bowsong's village, was not a stone's throw in width. Throughout the whole distance from the Bramakund,

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the occurrence of numerous rapids, narrows, and rocks, render navigation out of the question above that point, and nowhere is it too wide to prevent the plaited bamboo ropes—forming the Mishmee bridges—being stretched from bank to bank.

The Mishmees all agree in saying that the river takes its rise at the top of a snowy mountain to the north, about ten days' journey from Bowsong's village, and the old chief, Sengsong, assured me that he had crossed it on foot many a time, a little to the north of Roemah. From this evidence it is quite clear that this branch of the Bramapootra is not the Tsan-po of Thibet, considering that that river takes its rise in the mountains bordering on the north of Turkestan, and explorers will do well to trace the course of the Dehong, if they wish to arrive at a solution of the question as to the course by which the great Thibetan river reaches the sea.

After the Council of Chiefs on New Year's Day, it had been agreed that Bowsong and Samsang, as their deputies, should join me at the end of the first day's march on the return, so that after camping, about three P.M., on the day that we left Sengsong, Bowsong, with his followers, marched into camp; but Samsang had been compelled to remain behind, as Bowsong said, on account of the death of his favourite wife, but I fancy his absence was more owing to the fear of Thibetan anger, at the prospect of his entering into communication with the accursed Palins.

While lying close to the camp fire, groaning with the pain of my ankle, I was struck with the number of our

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party, now augmented by the presence of the two strange Khamtees and Bowsong. It was evident that unless we made better progress, starvation would shortly overtake us, and this thought nerved me to do what, for several days had appeared necessary, namely, to act as my own surgeon, and open the abscess on my ankle. Neither Chowsam nor Philip had nerve enough to operate, and in my now weakened state I had shrunk from using the knife, but the consideration before mentioned determined me, and, with Philip's assistance, the deed was done, though the surgeon fainted in the act; instant relief was felt by the patient, and he enjoyed a refreshing sleep for an hour or two.

From this time my ankle caused me little pain, but continued fever had affected my spleen, so that I found it impossible to keep down anything but essence of beef. This was a sorry plight in which to begin a march of one hundred and fifty miles, but, in spite of it, I struggled on, and in five days recrossed the Boundary mountain, and again put up with Kaysong for two days, during which I could not sit up.

Matters had now become serious. My spleen was so enlarged, that I was compelled to keep a tight bandage round the waist, fearing to rupture it in some of the falls caused by weakness. A dreadful craving for acids kept me in a semi-state of delirium, occasionally relieved by drinking an acidulated preparation, made from the berry of a tree, called by the Degaroo Mishmees, gomarshee, and by the Mejus, sweshit. The leaf of the tree resembles that of the laburnum; the small brown dry berries,

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hanging in bunches, of the size and shape of grape clusters, are coated with a white effervescence of a sweetish taste, but so acid that it absolutely blistered my lips, which became raw from its constant use. The berries steeped in water furnish a pleasant acidulated drink.

The day after we recrossed the boundary, Chowsam despatched five of his men to his village for supplies of food, with which they were to meet us at the Brama-kund. Bowsong's followers took their places as porters, and the two strange Khamtees undertook to become my bearers, and from Kaysong's they almost carried me between them.

During the two days' rest with Kaysong, I had an opportunity of changing my clothes, and discovered, with horror and disgust, the cause of a very unpleasant irritation, which had affected several parts of my body ever since entering the Meju country. A number of ticks, such as infest sheep, were literally buried in my flesh; they had grown to the size of a finger nail, and were brown in colour, with two white stripes down the back. While not interfered with, their presence only caused a slight irritation, but when I tried to dislodge them, the pain was intense, and they defied every effort to pull them off. After trying to rid myself of them, I was obliged to call in the assistance of Chowsam, who, amidst peals of laughter, applied tobacco juice which, in a day or two, caused them to drop off. The Mishmee hills are infested with these pests, and all our party had suffered from them, more or less, before I discovered that they had attacked me.

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From Kaysong's house, five days' march brought us to the Bramakund. Nothing particular occurred during the journey, except a display of anger on the part of Chowsam, illustrative of the summary manner in which the Khamtee chiefs deal with their subjects. Two of the coolies—one of them a slave of Chowsam's—were very troublesome. They refused to carry some trifling article, which I had ordered the negro to give to them. On complaining to Chowsam, he made light of the matter, saying, that the negro had conveyed my request in a very insulting manner; whereupon I ordered the negro to carry the articles himself. This led to a great deal of ill-feeling on the part of the Khamtees, who fancied that I was displeased. Words ran high between them and the negro, and my orders to march were disregarded. Instead of proceeding, one of the Khamtees made a cut at the negro with his drawn knife, which the latter only escaped by dodging behind my back. Matters looked serious, and being too weak to enforce my orders in any other way, I drew my revolver, telling Chowsam that unless the disturbance was quelled, I would proceed to stronger measures. The chief, on this, rose from his seat next me in front of the fire, and ordered the Khamtees to be silent, and move off, but his slave, without heeding him, made another attempt to get at the negro. This was too much for Chowsam. He flew into a violent passion, and drawing his keen-edged knife, made a sweeping cut at the slave's neck. The man ducked just in time, and escaped with the loss of his hair, which he wore—Khamtee fashion—gathered

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into a thick top-knot. This was shaved clean off, as I am sure his head would have been, had his neck encountered the edge of the knife; as it was, the slave fled in terror, and ever afterwards behaved himself with the utmost respect.

As for the negro, he became so alarmed at the very evident desire of Chowsam to treat him to a taste of his knife, that he very prudently disappeared into the jungle. I should not have been sorry had Chowsam punished him, for he was utterly unmanageable in my now weakened state, and was a source of constant irritation to the Khamtees; and, though anticipating, it may be as well said here, that he finally broke out into open mutiny, and was only subdued by an exhibition of European science, which it is sometimes necessary for travellers to display.

On our arrival at the Bramakund, we found a party of Khamtees awaiting us, with large supplies of rice, fowls, and pork, and, what to me was worth more than all, three sour pomeloes, sent by Chowsam's mother. I was now unable to walk without the assistance of two men, and daily growing worse as regards my spleen. When I saw the pomeloes, I could almost have cried. Chowsam took the skin off one and handed it to me. I shall never forget the ravenous feeling with which I devoured this sour fruit. If any person had attempted to take it away, I verily believe I should have shot him; as it was, I eat the whole pomeloe, which was four times as big as the largest orange. This removed the intolerable craving for acid, and I spent a comfortable night. The

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following morning I was considerably relieved, and, after eating the half of another pomeloe, nearly disposed of a roast chicken. From this time I speedily recovered, and, after a day's rest at the Bramakund, we continued on for Chowsam's village, accomplishing the distance in three marches.

The day after leaving the Bramakund we camped on a long spit of sand running out into the Bramapootra, selecting this spot as free from leeches. Our camp-fires were about forty yards from the edge of the jungle, and there being now a very large party the fires were numerous.

About nine o'clock in the evening when we were sitting round the fire narrating our adventures to the two elders, who had met us with the party at the Bramakund, we were suddenly aroused by the loud trumpeting of a herd of elephants on the opposite bank of the river, who for an hour or more kept up a dreadful commotion.

The Khamtees said that the herd were bathing previous to coming across the river to our fires, and that in all probability they would keep in our neighbourhood all night, as elephants are very fond of eating the ashes of burnt wood for the sake of the potash they contain. Wherever a tract of jungle is burnt in an elephant country, their fresh traces will always be seen, and I suppose our numerous camp-fires, looking like a jungle-fire, had really attracted the herd, for they kept us awake for several hours. About midnight, as our fires burnt low, they crossed the river and approached so close to us that we could hear them as they tore down the branches of

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the trees in the neighbouring jungle. When they were apparently quite close to the river bank Chowsam asked me to fire off the rifle, and as I did so the whole party sent up a yell which sent the herd crashing through the jungle at a tremendous pace. They did not go far away, however, as we heard them trumpeting next morning at daylight higher up the river.

After the elephants had left us, and all had made themselves snug for the night, another alarm speedily roused everyone. A couple of tigers commenced a serenade in the jungle close by, and their roars brought us all to our legs in a moment, while the dogs broke loose, and, with frantic barking rushed into the jungle. I bewailed their loss as certain, for I knew that if the tiger turned to bay both dogs would rush in to lay hold, in which case their fate was sealed; and even if they escaped the tigers, I questioned whether they would be able to find their way back to camp through the jungle. Next morning just as all were busy with preparations for breakfast, the dogs came into camp covered with blood, and at first sight I made sure that they had been mauled by some wild beast, but on a closer examination they turned out to be literally covered with leeches, and while I busied myself in picking off the ravenous little creatures, I discovered, for the first time, that both dogs had got hair leeches in their nostrils. It was not until they had been without water during the day's march, and tied up in the sun for an hour after we camped, that the leeches protruded from their nostrils far enough to enable Chowsam —with the aid of a pair of bamboo pincers—to dislodge

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them by a dexterous jerk. When taken out they were more than three inches in length, and as thick as a pipe stem. If once these slippery creatures evade the hold, they retreat into the farthest recesses of the nostril, and are very wary of affording another chance. It is difficult to see them in the nose of a dog, as the animal is constantly licking itself, and the leech keeps out of the way; but their presence can always be detected by the constant snorting noise made by the dogs in trying to dislodge them. I had observed the distress of Bob and Nell ever since we entered the Mishmee country, but fancied that they were suffering from cold, and I daresay if Chowsam had not told me what was the matter, when I was engaged in picking off the other leeches, I should never have discovered what ailed them.

The presence of these leeches in the nostrils of animals, beyond creating great irritation, does not appear to cause any harm. My dogs must have been troubled with them for nearly two months, yet I am not aware that they suffered any injury from these unusual occupants of their nasal organs. What their effect might be in case of their getting into the nose of a human being, I cannot say, but I can imagine it would be highly unpleasant. The Chinese, with their refined ideas of torture, would probably delight in trying the experiment of putting these horrible little things up the noses of criminals.

One more long march from the last camping place brought us to Chowsam's village. Our arrival was welcomed by the whole village. Gongs sounded, dogs barked, and everyone enquired at once how Koopah

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Sahib was. Our wayworn appearance and travel-stained garments, excited the pity of all, and I was escorted to Chowsam's house by a couple of the elders, who gave me an arm each.

Instead of being put into the Bachelors' Hall, this time I had the strangers' room in Chowsam's house, where I was cared for by his wife and mother, who, under the direction of Philip prepared palatable meals for me, and kept a supply of lemonade constantly ready. The swelling in the region of my spleen rapidly subsided under the influence of large quantities of citric acid which I consumed, and a rest of two days with Chowsam enabled me to start for Sudiya. Four of the trusty Khamtees manned his dugout and acted as my guard, while provisions of all kinds, much more than Philip and myself could consume, were provided for our journey.

Chowsam wished to entertain Bowsong for a few days at his village, so I left them to follow me to Sudiya, and taking a final farewell of the Khamtee villagers, we shoved off from the river bank, and were carried rapidly down stream by the current.

The first night we passed just below Gregory Island in a temporary hut of some Khamtees, who were out on an elephant-catching expedition. The following day as we were quietly floating down stream, drifting with the current, we witnessed a very exciting scene. A half-grown spotted deer, chased by a pack of wild dogs, plunged into the stream not ten yards from our boat, and made for the opposite bank. The poor little creature was nearly done, and some of the foremost dogs were

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not three yards behind as it sprang into the water. One of the boatmen jumped overboard and caught the deer before I could get the rifle ready. Man and deer reached the bank, and then a struggle commenced; but the deer was too strong, and upsetting the Khamtee made good its escape. The dogs thus suddenly deprived of their prey collected on the bank for a minute or so, until they made out our boat, and then disappeared instantly. These dogs are larger than a jackal, and more wolfish in appearance; indeed, they might easily be mistaken for wolves, but for their curled tail. They appeared to me very similar to the wild dog which I have seen in Australia, and their habit of hunting in a pack is very similar.

The Assamese tell wonderful tales of their cunning and sagacity. They say that when a pack goes out to hunt, an old dog goes in front and searches for fresh scent of a deer: having found it he starts off alone, and having ascertained the whereabouts of the quarry, returns to the pack, which he then disposes of in a circle of a mile in diameter round it; each member of the pack having a part allotted to him. These precautions having been taken, the old general starts alone once more in search of the victim, and on finding gives chase. The startled deer of course flies from his enemy, who follows, giving tongue as a signal to the rest of the pack. The deer, far outstripping the dog, rushes on, but is suddenly met in front by one of the outlying dogs, who gives chase; the deer, of course, turning to the right or left, again rushes off only to be met and turned by

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another dog; and thus, turned at every point, the poor animal becomes more and more exhausted, while the pack gradually close in upon it, leaving no avenue of escape, and dozens of sharp fangs soon feast on the victim which has thus been run to death. This is no imaginary tale. There is little doubt but that these dogs do use strategy in chasing their game, otherwise they could never catch the deer in a country where cover is always at hand, and of such a nature that no dog in the world could follow a deer through it. Tall elephant grass, nine or ten feet high, through which a deer can travel at a great pace, would be almost impenetrable to a dog, and then there is so much water everywhere that the scent would be soon lost in it.

Just before we reached the river Koondil, and when we were within sight of the native huts forming the bazaar at Sudiya, we were overtaken by one of the terrific thunderstorms common in Northern Assam during the cold season. The first notice of its approach was the rising of an inky black cloud from the south, which came up with wonderful rapidity till the whole sky presented the appearance of a black canopy. A distant roaring sound, increasing in volume every instant, announced the coming hurricane, which presently burst upon us with terrific fury. At the same instant the black cloud seemed to split asunder and a stream, rather than a flash, of lightning blazed down to the very ground, accompanied by a deafening explosion. This was the opening of the storm, which raged for half an hour with a sublime fury, surpassing in its terrible grandeur anything of the

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kind I have ever witnessed in other parts of the world. The vivid and incessant flashes were accompanied by literal coruscations of electric light, while the roar of the hurricane seemed to vie with the deep continuous roll of the thunder.

On the approach of the storm we made fast our dug-out to the river bank, and the Khamtees ran for the jungle where they crept under shelter of the trees and threw themselves flat on their faces. Philip and I remained in the boat with the dogs, not knowing what was about to happen, though the Khamtees, to do them justice, had tried to warn us by pointing to the sky and tapping their head with significant gestures. Almost simultaneously with the first flash hail, as large as nuts, began to fall, and in a few seconds we seemed to be literally pelted with lumps of ice as large as a hen's egg. Philip, with a wild look of terror, jumped ashore and ran for the jungle, but a well-directed hail-stone struck him on the back of the head and rolled him over. Partially stunned, he however picked himself up, and staggering like a drunken man, reached the shelter of the trees. My poor bulldogs, at the first blows of the hail, sprang growling to the side of the boat, as if to see who was pelting them, but they were soon knocked senseless into the bottom of the dugout, where they lay, getting badly mauled. As for myself, a stout pith hat fortunately protected my head, but before I reached the jungle I received such punishment that my right arm was quite disabled, and I felt the bruises inflicted by the hail for several weeks.

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After the storm had passed we made our way to Sudiya, where I was most hospitably welcomed back by my kind friends Major and Mrs. Nowell. My first task was to resume once more the outward appearance of a civilised being. The tangled and matted masses of hair and beard were washed and combed, and a delicious warm bath, followed by clean garments, completed the most luxurious toilet I had indulged in for a long time.

Every article of clothing belonging to Philip and myself, with our bedding, was burnt immediately on our arrival. This course was rendered necessary from the abundance of vermin in them which had come uninvited from the Mishmee Country.

About seven in the evening the kind care of my hostess produced an excellent dinner, while mine host brought out the best of his cellar, and I returned early in the evening to a clean, comfortable bed, with feelings of that keen enjoyment of the luxuries of life which can only be experienced by those who, like myself, often spend months far away from civilisation and its blessings.

In a day or two Chowsam and Bowsong arrived at Sudiya and were rejoiced to see the Sahib looking so well after his two months' hardships. I gave the Mishmee and his followers large presents of brass wire, blankets, beads, penknives, salt, and rupees, on the receipt of which the chief presented me with his fur cap, and his men, kneeling on the steps of Major Nowell's bungalow, declared themselves subjects of the Queen. After this ceremony was over I sent them to the native political

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officers' quarters, where they received additional presents and spent the night very comfortably.

Next day I left Sudiya. Having been escorted to the boat by my host, Chowsam with Bowsong and their followers paid me their last adieux on the river bank as my dugout floated past into the stream of the Brama-pootra.

In twenty days I arrived at Calcutta, suffering from another attack of fever. Here I bade good-bye to the faithful little Philip, whom I sent back to China, and shortly after left Calcutta for Bombay, where I embarked for home, with feelings of thankfulness at being once more about to visit my native land after an absence of fourteen years, the last three of which had been devoted to travels through strange and often unhealthy countries inhabited by wild tribes.

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APPENDIX.

The following is a list of the principal Mishmee Clans, and the Chiefs governing them in 1870:—

DEGAROOS.

Chiefs' Names.	Name of Clan.
Poso	Yo-en.
Krosser, Prumsong, Takoosong, Cowysong	Tarying.
Kunsong	Brama.

MEJUS.

Bowsong, Sengsong, Punsong, Tongsong	Prun.
Ongchun	Serai.
Crumsar	Lap.

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MEJUS—*continued.*

Chiefs' Names.	Name of Clan.
Samsang, Tengke, Seng Sang	Lama.
Supsar, Sing-song	Tolang.
Nhatsong	Camli.
Suisar	Menyen.
Matang	Lâpar
Oong	Nah.
Kaysong	Ngntong.
Himsar	Tumbru.

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